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Research Articles

Presence of our Common Past: Husserl's Return to the Ancient Ideal of Research

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Abstract

Husserlian phenomenology examines its subjects by bringing them to their own presence. It is not immediately obvious how this is done when we are dealing with the past occurrences but actually our past does shape the way we see the world today. Galileo's inventions in the past guide our understanding of nature at present. In *Crisis of European Sciences* Husserl explicates this but the actual phenomenological study is done in his working manuscripts from that time. In the manuscripts he does not only study how Galileo's view is present today, but also shows how this naïve point of view of sciences is to be overcome by returning to more original views. In his manuscript D17 Husserl ends up with one of the perhaps the most controversial views presented by an eminent researcher in the 20th century and opposes Galileo's views directly. Husserl knew that others would laugh at him and think that he has gone out of his mind, but that did not prevent him from pursuing his investigations. The aim of this study is to search for the sense in Husserl's manuscript and to explicate how the phenomenological method turns to our common past, that is, history.

Keywords: phenomenology, history, earth, ethics, crisis

We live in a time, in relation to past, present and future. We also share a common understanding of these aspects. Our common view of past is called history. Edmund Husserl was originally not very interested in history, but as he developed his phenomenological method further, history became more and more important. It is not, however, immediately evident how the phenomenological method takes our common past into account. The method concentrated originally on how something absent becomes present. To use Husserl's early example, an amount of something (a number that is absent) becomes present when I count it and end up

with a number that is present. How can this kind of approach reach out to historical events?

The presence of our common past is a two-way street: We can either try to place ourselves in the position of people from the past, or we can try to figure out how past ideas still influence our common present. I, for example, structure language starting from sentences. The idea of doing that was invented by Aristotle in the past, and it influences the way we structure language today. The presence of the past in what is currently present is of particular interest to Husserl. Through using the phenomenological method it became more and more evident to him that the way phenomena are present to us has been formed in the course of our common history. Therefore, we should study that history in order to see what elements do make a difference between absence and presence.

The way we understand reality has been influenced a great deal by natural sciences over the last four hundred years. It is, thus, not a surprise that Husserl took Galileo as a primary example in his later work *Crisis of European Sciences*. Let us start with that. The work was partly published during Husserl's lifetime (1936), but the edited and supplemented version was published posthumously in 1954. There is, nevertheless, a problem with these published versions of the *Crisis*. In these versions Husserl explicates a research project rather than does phenomenological research. In order to find out how Husserl really works with the problems presented in the *Crisis*, one needs to study his working manuscripts from that time.

In his famous (or infamous) manuscript D17, Husserl explicitly takes Galileo's case up. D17 is something of a hot potato in Husserl-research. It was chosen to be the first publication of Husserl's huge *Nachlass* but was not published in *Husserliana*. The editor of the sequel of the D17, D18 saw it as necessary to explain to the readers that Husserl is not trying to substitute scientific accomplishment with primitive speculation (Schütz 1940). Husserl himself knew that his results would be seen as ridiculous or crazy. The reason for that is clear: Husserl states outright that the Earth does not move. It is difficult to imagine any other statement that would be more difficult to

accept for Western-educated people to accept. The statement at least seems to be as impossible as the claim that the earth is flat, which was known to be clearly untrue already in antiquity. Some researchers have, however, taken Husserl's study seriously and seen it as an important contribution to modern cosmology. I will return to that later, but we will start from the *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*.

1. The Galileo affair and the phenomenological method

We all know the story of Galileo Galilei and the Catholic church. Galileo defended the Copernican view of the Solar system and the Roman Catholic Inquisition condemned and sentenced him in 1633. Usually we think that Galileo's views were right and it was a mistake of the church to sentence him. However, it took over two hundred years before Foucault's pendulum demonstrated that the Earth rotates (Darwin 1994, 421). It then turned out that Earth's movement in its orbit around the sun cannot be demonstrated (Michelson-Morley experiments, cf. HuaVI/128–129). Einstein solved this with his theory of relativity, but that re-opened the problem of rotation. How can Earth's rotation be relative? I will return to this question shortly.

In the famous section 9 of the *Crisis*, entitled *The mathematization of Nature by Galileo*, Husserl studies Galileo's case. For Husserl, Galileo was the first one to use method of modern physics, that is, to interpret nature through mathematics and measurements. Nowadays this approach is obvious, but what Husserl wants to do is to demonstrate that there was a time when the approach was new and not at all self-evident. His aim is to show how this new view came about before it became taken for granted.

Husserl's approach in itself does not differ significantly from the established views about the origins of the modern or mathematical natural sciences. We certainly could elaborate on events in greater detail and seek to understand better other researchers involved in the process of inventing modern physics, but in general most would likely agree with Husserl

until the end of the section. Instead of glorifying Galileo's invention Husserl saw it as a starting point for a naïve interpretation of reality. Galileo was a genius who at the same time discovered and covered. Husserl thought that Galileo started the development which led us to set aside the lifeworld, the world where we live, and replace it with some kind of a model of reality. James Garrison explicates this: "The experimental method of Galilean natural science is not ascent from life-world but rather the geometrically prefigured world of experiments substituted for it." (Garrison 1986). The task from the point of view of phenomenological research is then to "nullify the ideal that cover life-world" by using phenomenological reduction (Ibid.). This actual work, however, is done rather in the working manuscripts of that time rather than in the parts of *Crisis* published during Husserl's life time.

2. Husserl's Manuscript D17

It is tempting to judge manuscript D17 as a work where Husserl went astray. The quality of the studies in Husserl's *Nachlass* varies, as he himself also admits: "When I'm tired I fall back into old ways of working" (Cairns 1976, 69). In order to understand how phenomenology works one should find the texts where Husserl is not "tired". Alfred Schütz compares the possibility of seeing Husserl at work in these texts to having a recording of improvisation by Beethoven (Schütz 1940). But sometimes improvisation does not work and such a recording might as well have been about Beethoven accidentally sitting on piano keyboard. Some Husserl-scholars have, however, managed to hear "music" in D17.

Paul Ducros uses D17 to interpret Husserl's views, particularly ethical ones, in general (Ducros 2007, 2011). Maurice Merleau-Ponty mentioned the study already in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 359, 453) and studied it intensively during his later years (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 1970, 1992). Pierre Kerszberg saw the study as an important contribution to modern cosmology (Kerszberg 1987). Klaus Held uses the text in his cultural studies (Held 1998). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari develop their geophilosophy in a different direction but also for them Husserl is an

important forerunner (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). I myself have tried to show how Husserl's argumentation in D17 is phenomenologically solid and a good example of the phenomenological method (Himanka 2005). How then could Husserl's argument make sense?

As I have reconstructed Husserl's argumentation in an earlier paper mentioned above, here I will give here just a short version of his argumentation. Husserl starts by describing the starting point, the Copernican world view that people, at least in the Western world, share. The task then is to accomplish phenomenological reduction and set aside views that we have adopted as these views have become naturalized through repetition. That does not mean that they must be wrong, but our aim is to concentrate on that which is given to us as itself, in its own presence (Heidegger 1977, 383) and "evidence" is not based on repetition. How is the Earth, then, given as itself?

The Earth appears to me originally as a reference background for movement. When I move this cup, it moves in relation to my body, to this chair, to this building, to the Sun but ultimately, I "see" the movement in relation to the Earth. This is how the Earth is given as itself, as a reference background for movement and rest. From the Copernican point of view, I know that the earth circles around the Sun at the speed over 100 000 km/h, but this does not at all effect my original view of the Earth. From the scientific point of view, I can certainly understand that earth's movement should not influence my daily affairs, but that is not relevant in the phenomenological attitude. The movement of the Earth does not appear to me. Some might argue that the situation has changed since Husserl's time.

We know from astronauts' accounts of their experience that it has been a wonderful experience to see the earthrise (Chaikin 2007). Pierre Kerszberg, however, states: "The motion of the earth, as it revolves about its axis or around the sun, is never perceived as such." (Kerszberg 1987, 196) How are we to understand this statement? I can stand up here in my office and jump. In this process the earth moves in relation to me, but I do not claim that it actually moved. I can also connect to the Internet connection and find film footage from the surface of

the Moon. On it I can see the earth rising from Moon's horizon. But as I do not have to state that Sun moves when I see the sunrise I do not have to state that Earth moves in the earthrise. When I see the Earth move, I can always state that it is actually me and not the Earth moving. Let us return to Husserl's argument.

From this original point of view, it does not make sense that the Earth moves, as it is the background in relation to which things can move or stay at rest. This possibility is not open to the reference background itself. But if this is true, how have we adopted the Copernican view which now seems to be impossible? In order to understand this, we need to lay out the possibilities of movement according to Husserl.

According to Husserl there are the following basic possibilities of movement and rest:

A thing – can move or stay still

A basis-body – it can move me (a car, for example)

My body – I can move it

Others bodies – they can move them

The Earth – does not move or stay still

According to Husserl the basic statement of the Copernican view is actually not about earth's movement *per se* but about the statement that the Earth is a body, or more accurately in Husserl's terms, the Earth is a basis-body, a thing that moves in a way that we are moving along with it. In order to create the view according to which the earth moves we change the reference point of movement to the Sun, for example. The earth then moves in relation to the Sun in a similar way as a car moves in relation to the Earth. For us this does not seem strange at all, but things were different in the times of Galileo. Martin Luther, for example, found this idea silly and made fun of it in his Table Talk (Luther 1967). He mentioned that there was a scientist (Copernicus) "who wanted to prove that the earth moves" and continued: "this would be as if someone were riding in a cart or a ship and imagined that he was standing still while the earth and the trees were moving."

The crucial question for Husserl then is: Can we take the "sense" of being a reference to movement from the Earth and move it somewhere else? He studies this carefully but

finally ends up with the result that it cannot really be done. In Western civilization, however, we have changed the reference point of movement from the Sun (Aristarchus / Copernicus) to the landscape of stars (Mach), to ether (Maxwell), and have finally realized that one can move that reference point freely and have entered into the theory of relativity (Einstein). From the scientific point of view, it seems obvious, that we can change the reference point of movement from the earth, but I will point out some problems in this shortly. Husserl himself did not bother to take the naïve point of view of science seriously and deal with Foucault's pendulum, for example.

3. Husserl's Earth and natural sciences

Contrary to what is often thought, perhaps D17 is not that naïve even from the scientific point of view. This is actually the stance taken by Kerszberg in his article "The Phenomenological Analysis of the Earth's motion."

Kerszberg is well familiar with modern cosmology and states the following about D17:

"In fact, the manuscript contains the fullest analysis of Einstein's theory to be found anywhere in Husserl's writings. In this paper, I shall suggest that we view Husserl's phenomenological investigations of space in the light of their actual purpose which is to give critique of the theory of relativity." (Kerszberg 1987, 179)

In the article Kerszberg explicates the thoughts of Ernst Mach, W. de Sitter, Herman Weyl and Albert Einstein showing how D17 is a relevant study when we turn to basic questions of modern cosmology. He, for example, reads Husserl's exposition of the flying arc in relation to Einstein's famous 'elevator' example. I will not discuss this at length here, but instead, will briefly describe how the questions of modern physics are perhaps not that far removed from the view presented in D17.

People in the Western world tend to think that the Copernican interpretation of the Solar system is superior to the earth-centered Ptolemaic model. If we turn to consider scientific evidence this is far from the truth. After comparing these two models from different perspectives (kinetics, dynamics, theory

of relativity) Fred Hoyle arrives at the following result: "Today we cannot say that the Copernican theory is 'right' and the Ptolemaic theory 'wrong' in any meaningful physical sense." (Hoyle 1973, 79) From the point of view of the theory of relativity this is actually rather obvious: if movement is relative, how can we state that the Earth absolutely circles around the Sun (cf. Einstein & Infeld 1938, 223–224)? Earth's rotation, however, still seems to pose a problem.

Foucault's pendulum is an intuitive and a really convincing experiment. If one sets the pendulum at the pole, the earth below it moves just as it is supposed to move and if we move the pendulum to the equator that does not happen. In addition, there are Coriolis forces and one, for example, decides the best places to launch a rocket taking the earth's rotation into account. For us modern people this is really a convincing case and it is difficult to doubt the obvious fact of earth's rotation. But if this is the case we do have an absolute movement and that certainly is a problem from the point of view of theory of relativity.

In his 1918 article, Hans Thirring presented an alternative explanation to Foucault's pendulum and other similar phenomena (Thirring 1918). If the earth stays still and the universe revolves around it, the pendulum moves as it is seen to move.¹ This solves the problem but opens up another one. The problem was presented to Einstein by Nobel laureate (in physics) Philippe Lenard in the 86th meeting of the *Gesellschaft Deutscher Naturforscher und Ärzte* in Bad Nauheim in 1920. Lenard asked:

"[I]f the earth rotates, then, according to Einstein, one can just as well say that the earth is at rest and all matter rotates around it. Then, however, the distant stars take on velocities that far exceed the speed of light. According to the theory, however, that [velocity] should be a limiting velocity. This is a contradiction in itself." (Einstein et al 2002)

Einstein's answer can hardly be seen as satisfactory:

"No, the speed of light is a limiting velocity only for the uniform, rectilinear motions of special relativity; arbitrary velocities of light can occur in system that undergo arbitrary motions." (Ibid.)

At about that time Einstein returned to the ether – which would have been one way to give a real answer to Lenard – and never gave up this view. This means that Einstein finally basically chose an ether-version of relativity theory supported by his scientific role model Hendrik Lorentz. One does not necessarily need to see this as a dramatic change, as Einstein and Lorentz had been working on the theory together, and the versions are so close to each other that it is difficult to say whether it is possible to create an empirical test to compare them (Erlichson 1973). It is, therefore, possible to state that with the theory of relativity, physics did not get rid of the ether after all (Wilczek 1999). Einstein is very clear on this: “According to the general theory of relativity space without ether is unthinkable.” (Einstein 2002) Einstein, however, wanted to understand the ether in a new sense – one in which we “take from it the last mechanical characteristics which Lorentz had still left it.” (Ibid)

Encyclopedia Britannica defines mechanics as a “science concerned with *motion* of bodies under action of forces.” (Goodstein, “mechanics” in *Britannica*; my emphasis) We can now take a look at the views of Husserl and Einstein. Einstein wanted to get totally rid of science concerning motion from his version of ether. Husserl, for his part, stated that his reference point (the Earth) does not move. Hopefully we can now understand Kerszberg’s point of view that Husserl’s thematization, although coming from different direction, actually deals with the basic question of modern cosmology. One could also make distinguish between the earth of physics (physische Erde; HuaXXXIX/512) and the cultural Earth (Kultur-Erde; HuaXXXIX/530), but, as we will see, according to Husserl, at the end (or rather, at the beginning) there can be only one Earth.

Husserl’s view probably still seems unacceptable to most of us, but perhaps it has more to do with our worldview than with the problem of there being a clash with science. It is difficult for us to question our basic views concerning the earth: it moves, it is a globe and not at the center of the universe. The shape of the Earth was a well-known fact already in antiquity and that is not a problem for Husserl. It was, for example, clear

already in antiquity that in certain situation we can see the Earth's shadow on Moon. The questions of Earth's movement and it not being at the center of the universe are from Husserl's perspective after reduction, mere opinions of a natural attitude and need to be based on evidence. And that is, from the point of view of the phenomenological attitude, a much more difficult problem than is usually thought. In order to see the full scope of the problem, we, however, need to first see how this relates to ethics.

4. D17 and ethics

At the time of Husserl, Germany was the leading country of scientific progress in the world. This did not, however, prevent the country from giving birth to a political movement that wanted to destroy an ethnoreligious group. Husserl himself had a Jewish background and it must have been obvious to him that Western civilization had taken a wrong turn before it entered its present stage. Husserl's aim in this situation was not turn his back Western civilization but to return to its origins in Antiquity. His aim was to renew (*Erneuerung*) these earlier origins and return to the early days of research (HuaXXVII).

For Husserl it was Plato who invented research. At the beginning each nation or tribe had their own understanding of the world and its origin. There were different myths about the world and its origin and it was not a problem that the myths interpreted reality differently. According to Husserl's history then came strange persons (*Sonderling*), most notably Plato, who had an idea: it is the same Sun, the same Earth and the same Moon that these myths interpreted differently (HuaXXIX/386–387; Miettinen 2013, 256–257; cf. HuaXXVII/189). There is only one reality which is the same to all nations and tribes. Research was invented.

It is perhaps not immediately obvious how D17 is an ethical study and what the interpretation of Plato above outlined has to do with ethics. Let us search for help from another philosopher who also criticizes the narrow scientific perspective of our culture. In his *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* Richard Rorty writes “we can always enlarge the scope of

‘us’ by regarding other people, or cultures, as members of the same community of inquiry as ourselves.” (Rorty 1991, 38) This actually describes well the attitude of Husserl’s Plato. We should enlarge our community of inquiry by taking others from different groups, nations or tribes into it and acknowledge that we share the same reality. This inclusion, however, must according to Rorty be done from **our** perspective. “We must work by our own lights” as he puts it. But, as Rorty admits, we cannot avoid ethnocentrism. How could Husserl’s renewed Platonic perspective solve this problem?

Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen asks Rorty: “But if your principle is to evaluate other’s suggestions ‘by our own lights’ are we not locked into some kind of dogmatic imperialism of our own culture?” (Kuukkanen 2015, 191) When we figure out what kind of rationality governs our research and therefore also our behavior and politics, we consider others from the point of view of **our** rationality and take an ethnocentric or imperialistic view. Kuukkanen, for example, in his search for governing concepts of rationality in historiography tries to overcome this by stating that our concepts of rationality should be community-transcending (197).

From Rorty’s point of view the aim is to form an unforced agreement between us and them. Just before our accepting necessarily ethnocentric starting point, Rorty asks who forms this group which aims at an unforced agreement: “Us? The Nazis?” (Rorty 1991, 38) The problem here, obviously, is whether these two possibilities are the same – whether we are Nazis. One might argue that if our rationality is community-transcending it prevents us from turning into Nazis. That might be the case but it will not give us guarantee that it will not happen. Our rationality might be open to some others (for example Aryans) while being closed to others (for example Jews). In order to avoid this, we should be open to all cultures and it is not at all obvious that we can do that. Rorty writes: “What we cannot do is to raise above all human communities, actual and possible. We cannot find a skyhook which lifts us out of mere coherence – mere agreement – to something like ‘coherence’ with reality as it is itself.” (Ibid)

Husserl's ethical statement in D17 is that he had found such a "skyhook" or perhaps rather an anchor. He states that there is only one Humanity and one Earth. On the other hand, Husserl does mention sky in the text and it also forms a common "ceiling" to all creatures on Earth (Held 1998; HuaXXIX/38,43; HuaXXXIX/153–154; 184–189). All cultures ever have had at least these two not-things in common: Earth and Sky. One community on Earth has, however, made a far-reaching interpretation and established the Copernican interpretation of the earth. Even they (that is we) have, however, started from the original Earth that is not a thing and does not move. In order to avoid the ethnocentric view, we should not impose this developed, Copernican view, on other cultures. We, however, are tempted to state the Copernican view as an objective fact that should be accepted by all subjects. Is this kind of education an ethical thing to do?²

There is, however, a methodological problem in Husserl's attempt to reach for the early days of research. The aim is not to state facts about the culture in Plato's days and at least we know that the culture in those days was not an ethical ideal. The aim is to reach for the origins of research and it is not obvious how it should be done. Husserl had to turn his method, phenomenology, towards our common past dozens of generations away.

5. D17 and history

Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in his notebooks:

"What has history to do with me? Mine is the first and only world! I want to report how I find the world. What others have told me about the world is a very small and incidental part of my experience. I have to judge the world, to measure things." (Wittgenstein 1961, 82c)

This view can be called anti-historical. Husserl, in his later writings, represented the opposite view. He writes:

"To think absolutely, every Ego has its own history, and exists only as the subject of his only history ... History is the great fact of absolute Being. The ultimate, metaphysical and teleological question is nothing other than the absolute question of history." (HuaVIII/506)

So, we can give Wittgenstein Husserl's answer: history has to do with me as I only exist in history and final ontological

and epistemological questions should be answered through history.

From Husserl's perspective, the starting point of me serves only as a preliminary phase. In order to enter into historical perspective, one needs to adopt a generative viewpoint. Anthony Steinbock explicates Husserl's generative approach as follows:

“generative phenomenology treats phenomena that are geo-historical, cultural, intersubjective, and normative. For Husserl, generativity suggests both the process of becoming, hence the process of generation, and the process that occurs over the generations as socio-geo-historical movement.” (Steinbock 2003)

There are two essential elements here. First, we are dealing with the process of becoming, constitution. Second, the study is intersubjective in that it not only covers others but understands them as constitutive and reaches even to those “who are no longer with us”.

The first element, the process of becoming, basically means that we distance ourselves from objective approaches. As we saw at the beginning of this study, Husserl's phenomenology aims to bring things to their own presence. Instead of searching for the correlation between immanence and transcendence or the subjective and the objective the correlation (adequate evidence, truth) takes place – or rather happens – between appearance (*noema*) and appearing (*noesis*), for example between number and counting. (Himanka 2006, 2019)³ Different phenomena appear in different ways. For example, world and language appear in a different way than a thing. That is why Heidegger used rather strange verbs to describe the particular way these phenomena appear: the world worlds (*die Welt weltet*) and speaking speaks (*die Sprache spricht*). The task here is to understand how history “historizes” or, in other words, understand history as history (“Geschichte als Geschichte”, HuaXV/397).

As we turn from the natural attitude to the phenomenological, we will leave the subject-object setup behind, or rather we will dig our way under it. Merleau-Ponty is more explicit in this aspect than Husserl and it is therefore no wonder Shigeto Nuki quotes Merleau-Ponty in his study on

Husserl and history: "it is a common error of mobs, heroes and historians to treat the *social matters* as an *object*." (Nuki 2002) Nuki continues by pointing out that the "same holds true also of history." No wonder, Husserl does not care about the objective data – datum of events – on which we often construed our studies of history. From the point of view of conventional historical studies, another strange procedure of Husserl is to write from the point of view of someone – Plato, Galileo – who creates, constructs the new way of understanding which will then pass through generations to us. Husserl uses the expression "my Plato" (*meinen Plato*, HuaXXIX/49) when he explicates how the Plato he is writing about is not an objective, factual one. These characters are not even meant to refer to the historical person who was born on certain day, for example. The approach is generative in a sense meant by Steinbock, as discussed above: there is a process of becoming and of generations through which new ideas pass to us. Let us turn back to D17.

D17 is not an easy text to read and we do not have a chance to close read it here, but let us take a preliminary look at a couple of paragraphs. The difficult aspect in reading Husserl is to see the difference between sections describing things from the natural and from the phenomenological attitude. The following section is a description from the natural attitude:

"... the earth, there was once no 'life' on it, long space-times were needed until highly complicated substances were fashioned and subsequently animate life emerged on the earth. And that also takes for granted that the earth is only one of the accidental world-bodies, one among others, and that it would be well-nigh amusing to want to believe after Copernicus that the earth is 'the midpoint of the world [Welt]' merely because by accident we live on it." (229)

Husserl then mentions that phenomenology might (*vielleicht*) have backed up Copernican physics and likewise "anti-Copernicanism according to which God has fixed the earth at a place in a space." (229) Husserl further continues by signaling that he now tries to enter into phenomenological attitude: "Therefore let us reflect: [*Überlegen wir*]]."⁴ It is after

this that Husserl starts to write about history and he starts the paragraph by giving a strong emphasis on it: “But everything comes to this:”. In what follows, we read the results of contrasting the natural and phenomenological attitude:

“We must not perpetrate the absurdity of then seeing human history, the history of the species anthropologically and psychologically within the evolution of the individual and people, the cultivation of sciences and the interpretation of the world as an obviously accidental event of the earth which might just as well have occurred on Venus or Mars.”

In the next chapter Husserl then goes on to present the main result of the study: “There is only one humanity and one Earth.”

What can we make out of this? Husserl distances phenomenological approach from both the scientific view (the earth could be replaced) and religious views (God has placed the earth at the center) of the Earth. The Earth in the phenomenological sense is tied to humanity and is essentially unique. Furthermore, that has always – throughout history – been the case for all of us. Husserl’s view is not geocentric in a religious manner but certainly the Earth takes the center stage for us humans and non-human others on Earth.

We can now join together ethical and historical perspectives of D17. In his study of phenomenology and history Nuki distances himself from narratological approach to history. Narratological approach is often used as an “instrumental device to establish our national, cultural or individual identity, which in turn works to eliminate the others that do not participate in the story concerned.” (Nuki 2002) The story of Galileo, for example, strengthens the Copernican identity and eliminates other interpretations of the Earth. Husserl, too, tells this story but his aim is to dig deeper through the sediments of history to the story of Plato, and in D17, his aim is to see behind all the stories backing up different identities: “it is the same Earth” (cf. HuaXXIX/16, 44; HuaXXXIX/524). In his late reading of D17 Merleau-Ponty develops a kind of archeology, which is in line with the interpretation given here. Husserl digs⁵ through sediments of history until he reaches the bedrock, the Earth, which will finally be reached in every excavation.

6. Conclusion

Nowadays the Western world identifies itself as the inventor of the scientific method, that is the mathematical approach to nature. This is connected to our understanding of the earth as a globe that is not the center of the universe and moves. These views form our identity and have come to appear as unquestionable. Indeed, questioning them rarely takes place and may even be unwelcome. The *differentia specifica* of Western culture can, however, be understood differently. We worshiped an already vanished culture, antiquity for about a half a millennium. We educated our youth to learn languages in which there has now been no native speakers for centuries and as late as at the time of Foucault's pendulum it was still possible to state that to think correctly is to think like Aristotle (Newman 1907 [1858]). This approach is still alive in phenomenological studies of Heidegger and Husserl.

According to Heidegger our concept of time is vulgar and unusable (*unbrauchbar*) (Heidegger/Wisser 1988). We tend to think that, primarily, time is to be studied within physics. This view was construed at a point in our history where Aristotle's lectures on time were posited within a collection called TA PHYSIKA, physics. Heidegger proposed that instead of considering time through the framework of physics, it should be approached through the framework of Being in general – an idea that made him start the project *Being and Time*. Husserl's D17 can be read as a similar kind of project in relation to space. Influenced by the natural sciences, we understand space as kind of homogenized, neutral matrix where no 'point' is, in principle, prioritized over another. Husserl wanted to return to history, passing all the way through "Galileo" to reach an earlier understanding of "space" where the Earth does have a special role. These studies are not historical in the contemporary sense of the word, but rather studies that both value our common past highly and rely heavily on it.

As these phenomenological approaches – for obvious reasons – turn their back on objective approaches these studies will certainly face opposition from those who favor objective methods. David Bell spelled this out by stating that there is

something “dismal and dogmatic” about phenomenological approaches (Bell 1990, 180). This certainly is understandable, and Husserl’s manuscript D17 is perhaps one of his most difficult ones to accept as a study to be taken seriously. My aim here, however, has been to take it seriously.

NOTES

¹ It is not immediately obvious from Thirring’s text that he is dealing with the earth, but this comes clear when one turns to correspondence between Thirring and Einstein (Einstein, Collected Papers).

² I do not here enter into Heidegger’s view of Earth but from the ethical side this cast a dark shadow over considerations. Heidegger returns to this theme of earth frequently after *The Origin of the Work of Art* (especially in GA4, GA5, GA7, GA12, GA39, GA60 GA73 and GA75) and does that also in his notorious Black Notebooks (GA94 179, 316, 382; GA95 73, 213; GA96 59, 83; GA97, 124).

³ Husserl performs reduction from immanence/transcendence to appearance/appearing in his *The Idea of Phenomenology* -lectures (Himanka 2011, 2019), but does sometimes seem to limit the study within immanence also after that, for example at the end of the Cartesian Meditations (cf. also Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxiv). In my interpretation I have followed Heidegger’s advice to concentrate on what Husserl does, on how his thinking proceeds instead of giving emphasis on the more programmatic declarations or self-interpretation (GA17/81).

⁴ Jacques Derrida misses this signal (“überlegen wir”) in his reading of the “Origin of the Geometry”. (Himanka 2011)

⁵ Husserl once told to Dorion Cairns: “My work is not that of building but of digging.” (Cairns 1976, 10)

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The *Primal I* and the Anonymous Origins of Time in Husserl's Genetic Phenomenology

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Abstract

Husserl's analysis of reflection leads to the discovery of the anonymous character of functioning subjectivity, which is further developed through an examination of the living-present (*Lebendige Gegenwart*) in the context of his genetic account of time-constitution. Given phenomenology's reliance on first-personal access and evidence, the anonymity of the flow brings about certain questions regarding how to account for it and if it is indeed a part of my experience. In this paper, I reflect on the problem of accessing and accounting for the primal I in phenomenological reflection. Taking from Ronald Bruzina and László Tengelyi's readings, I claim that genetic analyses lead to an absolute *Faktum* in which the existence of Ego and World coincide. This brings me to consider whether the primacy of the primal-I (*Ur-Ich*) as the ultimate source of temporalization that is often displayed in Husserl's work can be considered a necessary result of the analysis of temporality or rather a theoretical gesture or choice in favor of maintaining the strong first-personal character of phenomenological inquiry. Against this view, a French-inspired interpretation that focuses on the equi-primordially of primal-I and primal-Hyle can be seen as a rival reading that opens up a new path in the tradition.

Keywords: primal-I, primal-Hyle, living-present, temporalization, equi-primordially

1. Introduction

The idea of an impersonal consciousness is not uncommon amongst phenomenologists, especially in the French

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tradition: Levinas and Henry, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, all work with some notion of an ego-less domain where personal consciousness originates and develops. The problem with these usages of the pre- or im-personal is that it is not easy to provide proper justification for them. In the context of Husserl's phenomenology, the evidence that allows us to make claims about the structure of experience is tightly related to first-personal givenness. The immediate access to our own conscious experiences is what grounds phenomenological certainty, and, together with the performance of the reduction, provides a strong criterion for the validity of any results. Husserl's insistence on this methodological principle has long been a contentious point amongst those who believe it can lead to an overly subjectivistic idea of philosophy. However, the desire to avoid this potentially harming consequence is not enough to undermine its validity.

A first person can be characterized as that which is given in a different manner than objectivities, and that can be ascribed to myself as the "I" of enunciation. When it comes to the passive, anonymous ground of conscious experience, we face a peculiar problem, namely that through first-personal reflection we seem to reach a non-personal consciousness. That this inert background is prior to the personal realm suggests that it is also prior to the emergence of the first-person, and thus to the related evidence on which our affirmations should stand. But this would mean that I can come in contact with something through an experience that is not mine. How is that possible? When we reach the pre-personal consciousness, we do not encounter it as a content of experience, and this is precisely what makes it *anonymous*. It is, in fact, not a different layer but our own consciousness regarded as an *operating consciousness* in the present moment: once we turn it into the object of our reflection, it ceases to be operating since now the operating consciousness is the one conducting the act of reflection. This makes it impossible to identify the functioning consciousness as my own *while* it is functioning, and so it is described as anonymous. At the same time, because it is an anonymity that is given to *me*, and it is retrospectively identified with myself,

Husserl holds that this pure passive field is nevertheless centred around an I, namely the primal I (*Ur-Ich*):

„Bewusstseinsstrom in seiner Uroriginalität <ist> undenkbar ohne ur-originalen Ichpol. Er liegt auch im anonymen Bewusstseins Erlebnis. Der Reflexionsakt enthüllt das im Modus Soeben unreflektierte Erlebnis und seinen Ichpol; aber beides in Deckung derselbe <Pol>.“ (Hua 15, 350)

“The flow of consciousness is unthinkable in its primal originality without the primal original I-pole. This is there even in anonymous living conscious experience. The act of reflection reveals the unreflective living experience and its I-pole in the mode of the just-now; but in coinciding both are the same pole.”¹

The *mineness* of experience is what leads Husserl to incorporate the primal Ego as a central notion in his genetic analysis. My aim in this paper is to show that this is not a necessary step but rather involves an interpretative and theoretical *choice*. I will do this by analysing Husserl's account of time-constitution and primal temporalization, focusing on the late genetic stages of his work. I begin by presenting the notion of primal-I as the subject of the living-present, and introducing some competing interpretations about the process of primal temporalization and the nature of the originary flow of time. I then go deeper into the consequences that stem from the anonymous character of the flow, and consider the thesis of the primal I as a non-being (*neon*). After briefly addressing a potential distinction between forms of primordiality in the specialized literature, I take a closer look at Husserl's reconstruction of the genesis of time. Following László Tengelyi's reading, I claim that genetic analysis leads to an absolute *Faktum* in which the existence of the ego and non-ego pole coincide. Faced with this *Faktum*, an interpretative choice is warranted: either genesis is considered, in a Merleau-Pontyan line, as an equi-primordial process between subject and world or rather, as a more orthodox reading of Husserl would suggest, the primacy of the primal-I in the process of primal temporalization is privileged.

2. The living present

Husserl's reflections on the primal I, are closely linked

with his developments on time, whose constitution is at the very bottom of the unfolding of conscious experience. This is clear from the fact that Husserl speaks of the primal I mainly in the Bernau manuscripts on time (Hua 33, from 1917/18) and in the C-manuscripts on time (Hua/Mat 8, from 1929-1934). In the elemental levels of experience, subjectivity and time get conflated in such a way that being able to thematize the primal I would be like witnessing the beginning of time. The anonymity that is reached through reflection can also be accounted for in terms of the impossibility of reaching the ever-functioning source of time, that Husserl will address in the late manuscripts under the name of “living present” (*Lebendige Gegenwart*), a perpetually self-renewing present that gives rise to the flow of time by becoming modified in retention.

This living or flowing present is one of the names Husserl uses to describe the ultimate structure of consciousness, which he had partially previously addressed under the notions of primary temporalization, originary impression, absolute consciousness or subjectivity, etc. Husserl defines this structure as the originary source from which time emerges or, more accurately, as the movement of temporalization itself from which consciousness is developed along with every temporal transcendence, the “*originary stream*” (*Urström*), the originary ground on which “*the last originary source of the spatial world and its form of spatio-temporality lie.*” [Der Urstrom der lebendigen Gegenwart ist die Urzeitigung, in welcher der letzte Ursprung der raumzeitlichen Welt und ihrer Form der Raumzeitlichkeit liegt] (Hua/Mat 8, 4).

The living present is at the same time flowing and static because, while being the origin of the flow of time, it cannot itself be *in* time. It is an eternal present and not a passing present moment. If it were the latter, it would become a duration or a temporal content, thus presupposing the flow that it gives rise to. What Husserl calls the ‘primal I’ is the Ego-centring of this living present. Once it has been retained, the I is already *in* time and so it is no longer the first layer, the origin of time. The living present has to be thus in a way outside of time or, as Husserl puts it, it has to be “trans-temporal”, the same as the primal I:

„(...) das Ich als identischer Pol für alle Erlebnisse und für alles in der Intentionalität der Erlebnisse selbst ontisch Berschlossene (z.B. die vermeinte Natur als vermeinte) der Pol ist für alle Zeitreihen und notwendig als dar „über“-zeitlich ist, das Ich, für das sich die Zeit konstituiert, für das Zeitlichkeit, individuell singuläre Gegenständlichkeit in der Intentionalität der Erlebnissphäre da ist, das aber nicht selbst zeitlich ist. In diesem Sinn ist es also nicht „Seiendes“, sondern Gegenstück für alles Seiende, nicht ein Gegenstand, sondern Urstand für alle Gegenständlichkeit. Das Ich sollte eigentlich nicht das ich heißen, und überhaupt nicht heißen, da es dann schon gegenständlich geworden ist. Es ist das Namenlose über allem Fassbaren, <das> über allem nicht Stehende, nicht Schwebende, nicht Seiende, sondern „Funktionierende“, als fassend, als wertend usw.“

“The I [as identical centre, the pole, to which the entire content of the stream of experience is related] is “trans”-temporal. It is the I for which time is constituted, that for which there is temporality, that is, that for which there is the individually singular objectivity in the intentionality of the sphere of experience; but the I itself is not temporal. In this sense it also is not “being,” but the opposite to all being, not an object over against, but the primal carrier for all objectivity. The I should properly not be called I; it should not be named at all, because then it is already something objective. It is the nameless, beyond all not as standing over everything, nor is it hovering, nor being, but rather ‘functioning,’ as conceiving, as valuing, etc.” (Hua 33, 277-278)

Husserl puts forward this idea as a way to solve a problem concerning a potential infinite regress in the constitution of time. In the lectures on internal time-consciousness, he distinguishes between the constitution of objects that have a duration in time and the acts through which they are constituted. He realizes these acts, the ‘lived experiences’ (*Erlebnisse*) exhibit a temporal character of their own. Indeed, lived experiences have a beginning and an ending in time, they relate to one another in the flow of internal time-consciousness, they are organized temporally and brought together by the common feature of being *my* experiences. In order for them to be brought together and organized in such a way, they must be manifested or given to consciousness in some way. The absolute time-constituting flow is where these acts are themselves constituted. In order to avoid an infinite regress, the absolute flow cannot be given in the same way as the experiencing acts, since this would entail there is another

flow constituting this one, and so on. Therefore, the absolute flow must itself be at once constituting and constituted. How exactly this occurs can be difficult to explain, since “*The constitution and the constituted coincide, and yet naturally they cannot coincide in every respect*” (Hua 10, 83; Husserl 1991, 88). We can find in the upsurge of time a type of paradox. In a manuscript from the C-group, Husserl uses this term to describe the living-present, as that which can only show itself as non-temporal once it is temporalized:

„Nun aber ist das Paradox, dass auch die Zeitigung sich zugleich selbst verzeitigt, dass lebendige Gegenwart selbst wieder, als gegenwärtige lebendige Gegenwart, in soeben gewesene lebendige Gegenwart kontinuierlich überleitet usw. Auch diese Paradoxie muss zur Klärung kommen.“

“Now, however, it is paradoxical that the temporalizing also temporalizes itself, that the living present itself, as present living-present, continuously passes into the living present that has just been, etc. This paradox must also be clarified (Hua/Mat 8, 50).”

According to John Brough’s reconstruction of this matter on “Notes on the absolute time-constituting flow”², the basic constitution of internal time through lived experiences would already presuppose the absolute flow of time, and so this primal level must be posited. Thus, after the lectures on the internal time-consciousness, in a text written between 1907 and 1909 (Hua 10, 73) Husserl starts differentiating between three levels of time-constitution and most notably, identifying a basic level corresponding to the absolute time-constituting flow. These levels would then be: 1) objective time, where the objects of experience are constituted, 2) internal consciousness, the immanent flow of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*), and 3) the absolute self-constituting flow where experiences are themselves constituted. The third and most fundamental level is not, however, in need of a new flow to constitute it, since it is not itself temporal. According to Brough, the absolute flow is what will become the “living present” in the late manuscripts on time, and he notably describes it as “*merely the potentiality to experience all things*” (Brough 2010, 44).

The self-constitution of the flow is accomplished through what Husserl calls its double intentionality, and particularly

through *Längsintentionalität* (generally translated as lengthwise or longitudinal intentionality) as opposed to *Querintentionalität* which is the “transverse” intentionality directed at the objects of experience. The acts through which objects are intended via transverse intentionality have the temporal structure *retention-primal impression-protection*. Lengthwise intentionality reaches beyond the actual phase – the primal impression – through retention and protection (although Husserl seems to focus mainly on retention) to the past and future phases of the flow, ensuring its continuity and the connection between phases within it. This is simply because retention and protection, as the consciousness of the just elapsed or the next phase of the flow, reaches every phase of the flow by the same act of reaching the immediate ones (since retaining the last phase means retaining the phase that the last phase was retaining, and so on).

Dan Zahavi (1999) objects to Brough’s (and Sokolowski’s³) views that the absolute time-flow is a separate level of time-constitution. Zahavi argues that awareness of the lived experiences is nothing more than the pre-reflective self-awareness of the acts that characterizes consciousness. He claims that the flaw in Brough’s account, even though he might be interpreting Husserl in the right way (since his unfinished theory of time-constitution allows for multiple readings) is that he considers the experiencing acts as objects with temporal phases of their own, and for them to be constituted in this way – *in* time –, another level of the flow must be posited. However, Zahavi considers that only the objects of experience have temporal phases while the experiencing acts are experienced as *quasi*-temporal. Experiencing acts are only temporal objects when we reflect on them:

“it is only in reflection, where we are confronted with a relation between two different acts, the reflecting and the reflected, that the latter can appear as transcendent vis-à-vis the first. On the prereflective level, where there is only one experience, it cannot appear as a temporal object, since it cannot appear as transcendent in relation to itself.” (Zahavi 1999, 77)

So, the absolute flow and the flow of immanent time would be the same flow seen as constituting or constituted. In

this sense, Zahavi stresses the impossibility of a self-manifestation of the absolute flow. This is, indeed, true, but it does not necessarily conflict with the distinction between levels presented by Brough. In fact, Zahavi admits the difference between their readings could be simply a matter of emphasis (Zahavi 1999, 234). If we consider the absolute flow to be what Husserl refers to as the living present, then it is obviously not possible for it to manifest itself as such, but so is the case for pre-reflective self-awareness. It is through reflection that the pre-reflective givenness can become a theme. Before that, it is “*unexperienceable, unsayable*” [unerfahrbar, unsagbar] (Hua/Mat 8, 269). However, it is still for Husserl an (primal) Ego.

Although it might seem like a matter of scholarly nit-picking, this difference in nuance is at the bottom of what I understand to be the interpretative choice Husserl makes in favour of a robust first person. Being able to isolate, at the bottom of time-constitution, an ego-centred level of temporalization that can be considered independently of lived experiences, entails putting the material core that makes up those experiences in a secondary place. This will become clearer in the third section, but before, I will go deeper into the problematic status of the flow and why it cannot be said to be given.

3. Primal I as a non-being

Going back to the question of the anonymity of the flow, we can now say that if the flow is anonymous, it is because, technically speaking, it is not *given*. In its functioning aspect, the flow (pre-reflective experience, constituting consciousness) is only lived through; and when it manifests itself, it loses its originary character and it becomes objectified or ‘ontified’, that is to say, it is presented as a thing or an entity. It is also at this moment that it reveals itself as mine. In this sense, “primal I” is here a way to name what retrospectively appears as having been mine but in its originaryity was not given as such. As Rudolf Bernet (1982) points out, the flow has a way of givenness characterized by its retrospective character; what he translates as “post-factuality” (*Nachträglichkeit*). On these grounds, Bernet argues that the present is always unconscious⁴.

In a similar line, Bernhard Waldenfels considers the pure present as “a plain chimera” (Waldenfels 2017, 422), and places this impossibility of the present to coincide with itself at the bottom of a reconfiguration of Husserlian phenomenology.

The retrospective structure of the flow can be an argument in favour of defending the notion of a pre-egological stream of consciousness. This is, for example, the position that Sartre takes against Husserl in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, where he claims consciousness is pre-personal and the Ego a transcendent object as opaque as the Ego of another person. However, as Zahavi points out in response to this argument, the egoless structure of the stream means that temporalization is a completely passive process where the Ego is not actively involved, “*but although the passive syntheses are not initiated by me, they still happen to me, not to somebody else or to nobody*” (Zahavi 1999, 153). As regards the possibility of passive syntheses happening “to nobody”, Zahavi points out that the danger of admitting a pre-individuated stream would be mainly related to the theory of intersubjectivity: if the primal stream is pre-individual, it would mean all subjects participate in the same stream, thus levelling-off their differences and not recognizing the radical transcendence of the other. Epistemologically, this would undermine the objective status of the intersubjectively constituted world. Ethically, it would entail the other is simply grasped as a copy of myself, and thus what counts for me should count for anyone, which could be problematic. On the other hand, it cannot be said that the stream is precisely characterized by being individuated, because individuation only comes along once I find myself in relation to others: for there to be an “I” there has to be a “you”. But the constitution of others already requires that there be a primal Ego, which is the ultimate source of constitution. Therefore, this primal Ego cannot be one amongst many.

Shigeru Taguchi (2019) argues against both the position that holds that the absolute stream is individual, and the opposite which holds that it is plural, pointing out that at the stage of primal temporalization, the difference between being one or many does not apply, precisely because others have not yet been constituted, and so it is a meaningless distinction. He

also argues that it shouldn't be construed as a pre-individuated stream, for the primal I expresses a primal perspective, a living point of view that is always mine, and so it is first-personal. If we consider this first-personal character to be given only retrospectively, however, this can lead into a circular argument. There is a logic of presuppositions functioning here, such that the primal I is found to be a pre-condition for my irreflective experience of things and my reflective experience of myself:

„Betrachten wir dieses transzendente Ego, oder betrachte ich mich, als wie ich allen meinen Vorurteilen, allem für mich Seienden, voranzusetzen bin, als Urbedingung für ihren Seinssinn für mich, so finde ich mich als strömende Gegenwart.“ (Hua/Mat 8, 41)

“If we consider the transcendental I, or if I consider myself as to how I am presupposed in all my prejudices, in all that is existent for me, as the proto-condition for the sense of being those things have, then I find myself as the flowing present.” (emphasis is mine)

In another manuscript Husserl repeats this idea and even refers to the constituting anonymity as a non-being:

„Mit anderen Worten: Das Universum des vorgegebenen Seins ist das Universum des für mich in einer gewissen Form der Endgeltung, der bleibenden „Relevanz“ für mich konstituierten Seins. Was darüber hinausgeht in der Weise der konstituierenden Anonymität, in der Latenz, ist ein $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\varsigma$, es ist nicht nichts, sondern „Voraussetzung“ des Seins aus einer vergessenen Zeitigung, die noch nicht Zeitigung eines $\delta\upsilon\varsigma$ ist und so hinterher zu enthüllende ist und als notwendig zu erkennende Funktion zur Ermöglichung für Seiendes (und damit zu einer nachkommenden Zeitigung gebracht (wird)).“

“The universe of pre-given being (Seins) is the universe of what is given to me in the form of the final validation, i.e., of the abiding “relevance” of what is constituted being for me. What goes beyond that, in the manner of constituting anonymity, in latency, is a meon; it is not nothing, but rather a “presupposition” of being from out of a forgotten temporalization which is not yet the temporalization of an on. Thus it is something to be subsequently uncovered and recognized as necessary to the knowing function and as necessary for the very possibility of there being something existing (and thereby it is something to be made evident through a subsequent temporalization).” (Husserl XXXIX, 471)

As Eugen Fink points out in the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*,

“The first person that phenomenological reflection unveils is at the same time the source of phenomenological reflection and a product of

it. Phenomenological experience does not cognize something which is already existent, as what and how it is; it cognizes the sort of thing which is 'in itself' not existent." (Fink 1995, 76)

The pre-being that works as the pre-given horizon that makes experience possible is not something already existent that the reduction unveils but it is in fact produced through phenomenologizing. Fink refers to this as a "*secondary (or non proper) enworldment of phenomenologizing*" (Fink 1995, 116) different from primary enworldment in that it is not the process by which transcendental subjectivity objectifies itself into man, but the necessary objectification of the results of the phenomenological inquiry.

But why is postulating this pre-being necessary to explain experience? The idea that, at bottom, constituting subjectivity is a *meon*, a non-being, might be problematic not only for methodological reasons – namely that it is not given to intuition but presupposed – but also because it is hard to see how such a non-being could perform constitutive functions, given that constitution requires a sort of being-in-the-world⁵. This makes understanding its pertinence all the more pressing, and in order to do so we have to put the living present under the microscope. But before that, a quick note on the primordality of the Ego.

4. A note on primordialities

According to the specialized literature, at least two senses of the primordial Ego can be distinguished: the proto-ego (Ur-ich) and the pre-ego (Vor-ich). While the pre-ego seems to be employed when Husserl addresses the genesis of the ego in the past, the proto-ego is a genetic figure in the present. In this sense, Lohmar (2012) draws attention to the fact that the pre-ego is often employed to talk about the first stages of the development of the empirical ego in childhood, and Roberto Walton (2015) distinguishes between two forms of primordality (*Urtümlichkeit*) that the past pre-ego and the present proto-ego represent.

Regarding their difference, there is potential disagreement in the scholarship as to which one is most originary. I will follow here Walton, who states that, even when

the pre-ego can be thought of as a more basic figure, methodologically the proto-ego is the primary one:

“El origen genético-histórico es reconstruido a partir de un origen cognoscitivo. Por eso el proceso de reconstrucción presupone al protoyo. A diferencia del preyo que debe ser reconstruido, soy ya el protoyo como condición de posibilidad de la reconstrucción, como lugar originario de toda asignación de sentido y validez, como presupuesto anónimo y no-temático de toda experiencia, emoción o volición, y como fuente última de todos los horizontes.”

“The historical-genetic origin is reconstructed starting from a cognitive origin. This is why the reconstructive process presupposes the proto-ego. Unlike the pre-ego that must be reconstructed, I am already the proto-ego as a condition of possibility of reconstruction, as an originary place of all sense donation and validity, as anonymous and non-thematic presupposition of all experience, emotion or volition, and as the last source of all horizons.” (Walton 2015, 80)

Walton marks an interesting difference between the methods for reaching both these primordial spheres: *reconstruction* of the pre-ego and the *presupposition* of the primal-ego. Neither of these primal figures are actually given, but they are in one way or another connected to what is and, in Husserl’s view, required by it. They could not be given because neither of them is in time, but at the edge or the beginning of time. This is why the primal I does not begin or end, why it is “immortal”⁶.

According to the classification made by Dieter Lohmar (2012) and generally followed by Saulius Geniusas (2012), it is also possible to identify a different usage of the primal-ego in the *Crisis*, a result of performing a reduction to the primordial sphere that leaves aside all intersubjective events. This primal-ego of the primordial sphere is the Ego of the living present. The concrete living present excludes past and future dimensions as they are given thematically but it is a present *in* time and thus it cannot exclude them completely. In the primordial sphere time is already in motion, and the difference with normal experience is that we focus on what is given in the present without recourse to intersubjectively constituted objectivity. But the concrete present is not the living present as it is thematized in the C manuscripts. Here, the primal-present cannot be given because it is trans-temporal. Once it becomes a

concrete present it loses its originary character. It is, however, as Lohmar himself puts it, a question of different focuses and not different entities (Lohmar 2012, 302). His functional interpretation of the Ego suggests that “*The precise meaning of each of these arch-egos can only be determined in the concrete context of research in respect of different and ever deeper levels of constitution (...)*” (Lohmar 2012, 302). If we consider that most of these writings are manuscripts and not systematic works, it is even easier to understand the diverse array of perspectives on the Ego.

As I have suggested in this section, I find that the primal Ego in its most fundamental aspect is, as Walton states, the proto-Ego; and this proto-Ego is the primal Ego of the living-present that coincides with primal temporalization.

5. “Inside” the living present

How exactly, in Husserl’s view, do we get from the non-being of primal temporalization to the flow of immanent time? In manuscript C 10, Husserl explores what would be the inner structure of the living present and the most basic levels of affection.

The living present is characterized by a purely passive non-intentional consciousness. The primal ego, as we have seen, is referred to as the ego-pole of the living present, but sometimes it is also plainly identified with it. This is because at this stage the Ego is not separated from its counterpart in primal experience. As far as every lived experience is double-sided, that is, it has an Ego side and a non-Ego side, Husserl posits the existence of an hyletic pole in the living present, that in its most basic aspect is referred to as primal or proto-hyle (*Urhyle*), the core of material sense that sets temporalization in motion. At this point this core is indistinguishable on its own: “*The I is not something for itself and the not-I is not something set apart from the I, and between the two there is no room for a movement of turning towards.*” [Das Ich ist nicht etwas für sich und das Ichfremde ein vom Ich Getrenntes, und zwischen beiden ist kein Raum für ein Hinwenden.] (Hua/Mat 8, 350). The positing of a material core that will gradually become differentiated from the Ego pole is not an addition to the living

present but merely the result of taking a closer look at what the primal mode of experience should look like. It is, once again, presupposed by the regressive analysis of the already formed experience but not given as such:

„Nun könnten wir das natürlich nicht wissen, wenn es, obschon selbst vor-seiend, nicht konstituiert wäre und somit in seiner Weise ebenfalls das Ich, den selben Ichpol affizieren könnte und thematisch werden könnte – und so in infinitum. Also die Selbstkonstitution der transzendentalen Subjektivität führt auf die schönen unendlichen Regresse, mit denen ich schon in Bernau fertig zu werden versuchte.“

“Of course, we could not know that [there is such a core] if it were not constituted, even though it was pre-existing, and thus in its own way could affect the ego, the same ego-poles, and become thematic – and so on in infinitum. That is, the self-constitution of transcendental subjectivity leads to the beautiful infinite regressions with which I already tried to cope in Bernau.” (Hua/Ma 8, 189)

The genetic account of the primal sphere aims at ending this infinite regress, via a reconstruction of the beginning of temporalization. We find, at the “bottom” two primal sources (*Urquellen*) corresponding to the functioning Ego (*Ich als fungierendes*) and to the non-ego (*Nicht-Ich*) (Hua/Mat 8, 199). In order for them to become separated, the Ego must turn towards the *Urhytle*, which thereby becomes sensation-hyle (*Empfindungshyle*) affecting the I. This turning-towards of the Ego is motivated, in Husserl’s account, by a primal instinct (*Urinstinkte*) described as an instinct of objectivation (*Instinkt der Objektivierung*) that is directed in a general manner to hyletic data. (Hua/Mat 8, 258). Through this turning of the Ego that can now be affected by *Hyle*, “the hyletic proto-flowing, the proto-impressional” becomes a “new impressional” and gets retained, putting time in motion. In the lessons on the phenomenology of internal time consciousness, Husserl characterizes the primal impression as the absolute beginning of the generation of modifications that is time, and he states:

“One can only say that consciousness is nothing without an impression (...) it [impression] is the primally generated, the “new”, that which comes into existence foreign to consciousness, that which is received as opposed to that which is generated through the spontaneity proper to consciousness.” (Hua 10, 100; Husserl 1964, 131)

It would be possible to find in these passages the cornerstone of

the bifurcation that the French-inspired tradition of post-Husserlian phenomenology represent, insofar as the valorisation of the sensible over the subjective as the fundament of appearing is its defining feature (Bégout 2004, 35). According to Osswald (2016), authors like Zahavi (2002) and Montavont (1999) take them as proof of an equi-primordiality of Ego and World. Their argument could be summed up roughly in the following way: if at the most basic level of experience there is a fundamental union of (ur)Ego and (ur)Hyle, then this means that speaking of a worldless consciousness and making constitution fall exclusively on her side is a falsification of this fundamental implication of subjectivity and world. The potentially problematic consequence of these interpretations, however, is that they undermine Husserl's transcendental enterprise, which seems to rest on the key role of subjectivity as all-encompassing. Against these readings, Osswald takes a closer look at Husserl's later analysis of affection to suggest that it is the Ego's movement of *turning-towards* that the whole dynamic rests upon, restoring its primacy. Even if this is an instinctual movement, this instinct is, in Husserl's view, not opposed to consciousness but actually a proto-form of it. In this sense, Osswald stresses the immanent character of affection and warns against identifying *Urhytle* and the world too quickly; in fact, when we talk about the world, we are always referring to a constituted world, that as such cannot be involved with subjectivity at the elemental level reserved for the Ur-Hyle.

In a complex and thorough article on this topic, Ronald Bruzina draws attention to what he finds to be a certain naturalism that is "*not simply allowed but needed*" (2010, 118) in Husserl's late phenomenology. Even if *Hyle* is not to be immediately identified with the world, according to Bruzina it is also important to consider that this hyletic core is the basis for the constitution of objective nature, which is the first layer of the objective world. Let's recall that this whole genetic explanation of primal temporalization is merely a way of accounting for what, in pre-given experience, we find already at play. Transcendental life is always "*already in the midst of world-constitution*" (Fink 1995, 58), and what a radical genesis

attempts is to disclose this “absolute ‘fact’” (*absolute “Tatsache”*) (Hua 15, 403). “Absolute” because, even if what we find is factual, and so, as it would seem, *not* necessary, it is not simply the actualization of a possibility amongst others, but that which makes all possibilities possible. As Klaus Held holds in his study on the living present:

„Das letztfungierende Ich ist Urfaktums schlechthin; es hat nicht den Charakter des Zufälligen und Singulären gegenüber der absoluten Wesensnotwendigkeit und Allgemeinheit des Eidos, sondern als absoluter Ausgangspunkt alles Fungierens, als apodiktisches Ziel der phänomenologischen Rückfrage muss es selbst "absolutes Faktum" genannt werden.“

“The last-functioning ego is the original fact; it does not have the character of the accidental and singular opposed to the absolute essentiality and generality of the Eidos, but as the absolute starting point of all action, as the apodictic goal of the phenomenological inquiry it must itself be called ‘absolute fact.’” (Held 1966, 148)

Alongside the factuality of subjectivity, Husserl also speaks about the absolute fact of the world as being the fundamental ground for all experience:

„Ist es also „zufällig“, dass Menschen und Tiere sind? Diese Welt ist, wie sie ist. Aber es ist widersinnig zu sagen, zufällig, da Zufall in sich schliesst einen Horizont von Möglichkeiten, in dem selbst das Zufällige eine der Möglichkeiten, eben die wirklich eingetretene, bedeutet. „Absolutes 'Faktum'“ – das Wort Faktum ist seinem Sinn nach verkehrt hier angewendet, ebenso „Tatsache“, hier ist kein Täter. Es ist eben das Absolute, das auch nicht als „notwendig“ bezeichnet werden kann, das allen Möglichkeiten, allen Relativitäten, allen Bedingtheiten zugrunde liegend, ihnen Sinn und Sein gebend ist.“ (Hua 15, 668)

“Is it then “contingent” that there are humans and animals? This world is as it is. But it is countersensical to say accidental, because an accident includes a horizon of possibilities in which the accidental means one of the possibilities, precisely the one actually occurring. “Absolute Factum” —the word factum is used here with its sense inverted, precisely a “done fact” [“Tatsache”], here there is no doer [kein Täter]. It is precisely the absolute that also cannot be designated as “necessary,” that lies as the ground for all possibilities, all relativities, everything conditioned and gives them their sense and being.”

László Tengelyi systematizes these findings in what he calls Husserl’s metaphysics of primal facts (*Metaphysiks der*

Urtatsachen), consisting of four main groups: the Ego, the world, intersubjectivity and teleology (Tengelyi 2014, 184). Amongst these four, “*the respective ego as a primal fact seems at first to have a priority among them, but on closer inspection one discovers that this ego has additional facticity structures that deny it this priority*” [Das jeweilige Ich als Urfaktum scheint zunächst eine Vorrangstellung unter ihnen einzunehmen, aber bei näherem Zusehen macht man die Entdeckung, dass diesem Ich weitere Faktizitätsstrukturen zukommen, die ihm diese Vorrangstellung abstreiten.] (ibid., 184). Against a more orthodox–subjectivistic– reading of Husserl, he points out that “*intentional consciousness cannot serve as an explanation here because the question relates to an event in which an intention arises in the first place*” [das intentionale Bewusstsein kann hier deshalb nicht als Erklärung dienen, weil die Frage sich auf ein Ereignis bezieht, in dem überhaupt erst eine Intention entsteht.] (ibid., 193).

Beyond Husserl’s potential agreement or disagreement with the interpretations that follow his own work, a radical genetic analysis reaches some transcendental “puzzles” (*Rätsel*) (Hua 42, 81) whose solution does not depend on further analysis, but largely rests on the theoretical stance taken by the phenomenologist. A future inquiry into the possibilities and limits of the reconstruction method involved in these types of analysis could help develop some basic criteria for the validity of competing interpretations. For now, we have wanted to point to the examination of primal temporalization as the place where such interpretations take over.

6. Conclusions

The reflection on the living-present and the primal I has shown that, for Husserl, “*The I in its most original originality is not in time*” [Das Ich in seiner ursprünglichsten Ursprünglichkeit ist nicht in der Zeit] (Hua/Mat 8, 197). Paradoxically, in order to show itself as that which is not in time, it must become temporalized (Hua/Mat 8, 50). This temporalized objectification of the primal flow leads us to the presupposition of its timeless origin. This is the living-present, whose Ego-pole is the primal I. Genetic investigation has

reached an absolute *Faktum*, that involves not only the egological but the hyletic side of the experience. Because the functioning I is anonymous, but it is demanded or *presupposed* by genetic analysis, there is a certain openness in the question of primal temporalization. What may come across through our review of different readings of this process and the living-present within the scholarship, is that any treatment of the issue requires us to make an interpretative *choice*, namely, the choice to either consider the primal I, the Ego that turns toward primal *Hyle* in the living-present, as the most fundamental and elemental dimension of constitution; or to consider a co-constitution model where “subjective” and “objective” poles are considered to have the same status. This is by no means a trivial decision, and in fact it is one of the points of divergence between a more classical reading of Husserl’s phenomenology, and several divergent readings in post-husserlian phenomenology not only Merleau-Ponty inspired but also Finkean or Heideggerian. It is in this interstice that phenomenology as a tradition can continue to redefine or strengthen the basic notions and that Husserl has reflected upon, on its way back to the things themselves.

NOTES

¹ All translations are the authors, unless specified.

² In *On time, New contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, Lohmar & Yamaguchi (eds), Springer, 2010.

³ In this text, Zahavi discusses mainly John Brough’s “The emergence of an absolute consciousness in Husserl’s Early writings on Time-consciousness” (1972), and Sokolowski’s *Husserlian Meditations* (1974).

⁴ This might turn out to be problematic when it comes to explaining how it is retained, since, according to Husserl, retention of an unconscious content is impossible (Hua 10, 119). Husserl’s own views about the unconscious depicts it not as the opposite of consciousness, but as a limit within its spectrum.

⁵ A similar point is raised by Steven Crowell (2012) who speaks of “*an absolute consciousness that seems too anemic to constitute a world*” (p. 30).

⁶ The meaning of immortality here can be closely linked with timelessness and not with an infinite duration in time, as would be the case with a more intuitive, perhaps religious notion of immortality. Even though Husserl speaks of the immortality of the transcendental subject and not specifically of the primal I, the reason subjectivity cannot constitute its own ending is

precisely located at this level of time-constitution. For a detailed account of this topic see: Vecino 2021.

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A Heideggerian Account on Sense-certainty through Ent-fernung Based on a Re-entry into Hegel's *Phenomenology*

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Abstract

This paper presents a Heideggerian account of sense-certainty. As a phenomenon, sense-certainty was originally thematized by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a kind of experience that involves what “immediately appears as the richest kind of knowledge” (Hegel 1977, §91, 58). The need for a Heideggerian account of sense-certainty can be motivated as follows: First, Heidegger does not consider sense-certainty in his limited account of perception in *Being and Time*. Second, Hegel’s account pushes the onto-theo-ego-logic of the Western philosophical tradition, which Heidegger is critical of. In this paper, I propose that sense-certainty, freed from its onto-theo-ego-logical basis, can be critically reconstrued in relation to Heidegger’s notion of de-distancing [Ent-fernung].

Keywords: sense certainty, Heidegger, Hegel, perception, de-distancing

1. Introduction

Heidegger’s account on perception in *Being and Time* is limited. Nevertheless, it presents a somewhat clear picture of the role of perception in Heidegger’s Dasein-phenomenology. What emerges from the exposition of this work is that Heidegger takes perception to be epistemically inseparable from Dasein’s other faculties and attitudes. Perception, he argues, is dependent on Dasein’s existential attitudes thus rendering it difficult, if not impossible, to consider it as a stand-alone phenomenon. In particular, Heidegger ascribes understanding epistemic priority over perception:

“Any simple prepredictative seeing of what is at hand is in itself already understanding and interpretive.” (Heidegger 2010a, §32, 144)

In being guided by an antecedent understanding, perception unfolds primarily through our experience of things in their practical significance and in correspondence with their functionality within the context of social practices. Thus, our perception is guided by practical interests and, consequently, by a history of past practical encounters with the world. However, Heidegger also allows for cases of basic perception that, being fundamental, are not directly mediated by practical concerns:

“When we just stare at something, our just-having-it-before-us lies before us *as a failure to understand* it anymore. This grasping which is free of the *as* is a privation of *simple* seeing, which understands; it is not more primordial than the latter, but derived from it. The ontic inexplicitness of the “*as*” must not mislead us into overlooking it as the *a priori* existential constitution of understanding.” (Heidegger 2010a, §32, 145)

The ‘*as*’ mentioned here relates to a point that Heidegger (2010b) also touches upon in his 1925-26 lecture course *Logic: The Question of Truth*, namely, that perceptual acts are somehow enabled by our enactment of so-called ‘*as-structures*’ of experience (e.g., we see things as chairs, people, blackboards). It is through such structures that we come to perceive things in our immediate surroundings (see also Doyon 2016). However, as the quote shows, Heidegger’s point is that even such practically unmediated acts of perception remain conditioned by our understanding-based comportment. They are simply detached from one or more pre-existing ‘*as-structures*’ and, thus, remain epistemically conditioned by our practical understanding. So, even if our understanding plays no active role in our apprehension of the thing, our ability to simply stare at it derives from our initial understanding of the thing in question.

In this paper, I explore a different dimension of a Heideggerian take on perception as I constructively engage with Heidegger’s (1994) 1930-31 lecture course on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and, more specifically, how a Heideggerian account on the phenomenon of sense-certainty can be articulated based on such a reading. Sense-certainty,

Hegel stresses, “immediately appears as the *richest* kind of knowledge, indeed a knowledge of infinite wealth for which no bounds can be found” (Hegel 1977, §91, 58). Sense-certainty is the knowledge “which is at the start” (§90, 58) and it is as such epistemically primary to all other kinds of knowledge. Thus, sense-certainty differs, at least in the outset, from the kind of determinate, understanding-driven/-derived perception that Heidegger considers in *Being and Time*.

I.

Before turning to sense-certainty we must first scrutinize the status of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* in light of Heidegger’s critical interpretation as it unfolds in the lecture course. Only by doing so can we understand how to proceed with our constructive interpretation. At the conclusion of Part One, Heidegger summarizes his interpretation, contending that Hegel’s philosophical project should be viewed as the very “completion of Western philosophy” (Heidegger 1994, 126). Heidegger subsequently stresses that Hegel’s work fundamentally aligns with the Western philosophical tradition by adopting and developing an *onto-theo-ego-logic* approach to the question of Being.¹ In this connection, he summarizes Hegel’s position as follows: “for Hegel the absolute (i.e., the true being, the truth) is *spirit*. Spirit is knowledge, λόγος; spirit is I, ego; spirit is God, θεός; and spirit is actuality, beings purely and simply, the *öν*” (ibid.). The quote is central in that it also elicits Heidegger’s criticism of Hegel’s project and, hence, the attempt at uncovering absolute knowledge by locating it in relation to truth and infinity (including the infinity of the ego). However, a paradox emerges since the lecture course ends in a seemingly inconclusive manner. Heidegger remarks that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* remains an open work. Moreover, he explicitly encourages his students to independently make up their minds about it. In this connection, he re-states the purpose of the lecture course: the purpose is for his students to understand that ‘a confrontation’ with Hegel is required (see also, ibid., 30). Despite this, the lecture course appears inconclusive precisely because Heidegger’s final remarks take us back to the

beginning qua ‘the open nature of the work’; it takes us back to reading the *Phenomenology* once again.

But it does so with a twist. Heidegger also mentions his purpose of awakening his students’ *will* “to do justice to the work in its innermost demands” (ibid., 149). I interpret this as suggesting that while Heidegger challenges Hegel’s onto-theo-ego-logical approach and uses this criticism as a foundation for proposing a shift from Hegel’s focus on infinity to the finiteness of existence (specifically addressing the question of ‘where does Man stand’), Heidegger is not advocating for completely dismissing Hegel. On the contrary, the *Phenomenology* ‘remains open’ and should be re-encountered in light of Heidegger’s critical interpretation. One of Heidegger’s basic critical points is that Hegel’s philosophy lacks the “grounding [of] its [own] possibility” (ibid., 149). Therefore, it logically follows that insights from Heidegger’s critical *interpretation* should form the basis for any critical yet constructive re-entry into the *Phenomenology*.²

With his invitation for a re-encounter Heidegger tacitly motivates the workings of a novel dialectical logic. While the *Phenomenology* unfolds its own dialectical movement on the questionable basis of an onto-theo-ego-logic, Heidegger’s position entails a basic dialectical movement between, on the one hand, what is internal to the *Phenomenology* (i.e., how Hegel’s dialectics unfolds in- and for-itself) and, on the other, Heidegger’s basic criticism of the onto-theo-ego-logical elements in the context of his lecture course. Heidegger’s first step is to present a criticism, and the second step is to explore the opening actualized by this criticism. However, the latter cannot be seen in separation from Hegel’s dialectical philosophy as presented in the *Phenomenology*. At the same time, this step goes beyond the content of Heidegger’s lecture course meaning that we will have to charter into unknown territory as we inquire into those aspects of Hegel’s philosophy that can inform us in answering the finite existential question of ‘where does Man stand?’. This question is directly motivated by Heidegger’s criticism of Hegel’s commitment to truth qua absolute knowledge as infinity. The fact that the end of Hegel’s project is

already prefigured in the beginning (cf. above) means that we must begin before “the beginning of the work”. Heidegger asks:

“Is the leap into the whole of the absolute all that is left? In that case, does the problem not become simply the factual issue of executing or re-executing the leap? [...] [P]erhaps man does not stand at all and is rather a transition? [...] Can and should man as transition try to leap himself in order to leave himself behind as finite? Or is his essence not abandonment itself, in which alone what can be possessed becomes a possession?” (ibid., 149)

So, when inquiring into sense-certainty or, for that matter, any other phenomenon or mental faculty dealt with by Hegel, it seems to follow that our re-entry into the *Phenomenology* must give up on Hegel’s assumption that absolute knowledge exists and, hence, comprise the basis for any experience. Specifically, Heidegger explicitly dismisses the idea that a new leap into the absolute from the pre-beginning is sensible; instead, we must inquire into it in relation to our abandonment, which, indeed, pertains to our very Dasein and the fact that we are always-already ahead of ourselves.³

II.

Considering that our interpretative endeavor must remain faithful to the core of Heidegger’s criticism of Hegel’s project, we find that we need to inquire into the phenomenon of sense-certainty by answering the following question:

How is infinity related to sense-certainty in Hegel’s sense and, further, how do we thematize sense-certainty in the absence of such infiniteness i.e., in relation to (finite) Dasein?

The answering of this twofold question connects directly with our attempt to disentangle (or simply, free) sense-certainty from the onto-theo-ego-logical aspects of Hegel’s work. Thus, we hereby assume that sense-certainty is something other than, though not entirely different from, how it was conceived by Hegel. To be more specific: we recognize that there is a perception-driven attitude that grants us seemingly true experiences of things in our surroundings, while simultaneously undergoing changes over time that effectively overthrow our initial sense of certainty regarding the perceived. Indeed, our

initial certainty is challenged by the fact that ‘something’ undergoes a change—either in us, in our relation to the perceived object, or in the circumstances that condition our perception.

When we re-read the *Phenomenology* in light of Heidegger’s criticism it immediately becomes clear that infinity plays a key role to Hegel’s account on sense-certainty. Considering Heidegger’s summary of Hegel’s commitment to the onto-theo-ego-logic this is not surprising at all. Sense-certainty, Hegel writes, is a wholly receptive phenomenon whereby we perceive a thing in an immediate, non-mediated manner. To begin with, we approach the thing through mere receptivity; “we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In apprehending it, we must refrain from trying to comprehend it” (Hegel 1977, §90, 58). The thing is what appears to us in a particular moment.⁴ Sense-certainty is “the richest kind of knowledge, indeed a knowledge of infinite wealth” (§91, 58). This relates to the pre-condition of sense-certainty in the first place, namely the perceiver’s I which is the condition for constituting the truth of the thing in its moment of appearing (cf. §91, p. 59). Given that infinity (qua I) is at the very base of sense-certainty, it makes sense to ask if sense-certainty is perhaps indeed a falsely construed phenomenon given its groundlessness? Yes and no. Yes, if we consider how Hegel explains it. No, if we consider the fact that Hegel’s depiction of sense-certainty somehow resonates with our everyday experiences: things change, perish, etc., and we can have a sense of the fact that the seeming stability of our perception is constantly being challenged as things unfold in the course of the world and in relation to our finite existence. In this connection, we find that Hegel deals with at least two overall ways in which sense-certainty can manifest itself:

Sense-certainty as dialectically constituted. With the purpose of reconstructing sense-certainty in the absence of infinity (qua truth) which is brought about by the equally infinite I, it makes sense to consider Hegel’s brief mentioning of so-called *natural consciousness*. This kind of consciousness is characteristic of the initial phase of sense-certainty where it involves pure receptivity and no mediate comprehension. Here,

the perceiver comes to learn from “experience what is true in [the perceived thing]; but equally it is always forgetting it and starting the movement all over again” (§109, 64). Interestingly, this attitude is not found in animals and, hence, is limited to human Dasein. Hegel points out that the experience of merely staring at objects is not something that animals can have “for they do not just stand idly in front of sensuous things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up” (§109, 65). In other words, the depicted receptivity in natural consciousness is tied to human beings. *et*, what makes sense-certainty possible is the fact that we humans have the possibility to experientially oscillate from so-called natural consciousness, which is initially receptive, to the active, linguistically-mediated comprehension of the thing. Thus, had we only existed as so-called natural consciousness, such an oscillation would be closed off from us, and there would be no sense-certainty. This is because sense-certainty is constituted in a particular constellation involving pure receptivity (*immediacy*) and its subsequent mediation. It is a dialectical phenomenon. Thus, Hegel writes: “I have this certainty through something else, *viz.* the thing; and it, similarly is in sense-certainty through something else, *viz.* through the ‘I’” (§92, 59). And the mediation is brought about by the ‘I’ which evokes *universals* (in the form of concepts) to grasp the thing.

Initially, Hegel argues, we go beyond our receptive experience by adopting an assertive attitude towards the thing by not only asserting that “This is a tree” or “Now is night” but also by putting the truth content of such statements to a test⁵:

“To the question: ‘What is Now?’, let us answer, e.g. ‘Now is Night.’ In order to test the truth of this sense-certainty a simple experiment will suffice. We write down this truth; a truth cannot lose anything by being written down.... If *now, this* noon, we look again at the written truth we shall have to say that it has become stale” (§95, 60)

As Hegel makes clear, we intend the sensed object through our assertions and the concepts we employ. Yet, given the general nature of concepts and, hence, the fact that the sensuous given which we intend through the use of concepts

remains fundamentally unreachable (cf. §110, p. 66). This means that there will necessarily always be unanticipated alternations in the thing or in the mode or context of its presentation that do not correspond to the concept or concepts used in our asserting. Indeed, changes in sense-certainty fundamentally relate to changes in I-thing relation and, more specifically, on the side of both the I and the thing as the former seeks to actively comprehend what is passively experienced in natural consciousness.

Sense-certainty as 'a whole'. Hegel also allows for sense-certainty to happen in an abolished dialectical I-thing relation. There is moment in the progression of sense-certainty where it comprises "a whole which stands firm within itself as immediacy and by so doing excludes from itself all the opposition which has hitherto obtained" (§103, 62). What this entails is that the subject abstains from comparing individual appearances of the perceived thing (i.e., its 'Here's' and 'Now's'). Indeed, the mediacy through active assertion (e.g., 'Now is night') is no longer there, meaning that our experience merely flows with the changing object. Consequently, "this pure immediacy, therefore, no longer has any concern with the otherness of the 'Here', as a tree which passes over into a 'Here' that is not a tree..." (§104, 62). This is enabled by the essence of sense-certainty of being whole. For whereas sense-certainty began as a dialectical movement from a thing to the I (Moment 1); and from I to the thing (Moment 2), it has come to rests through the merging of its two moments expressed in the I and the thing.

So, how do we possibly unify these two aspects of sense-certainty by means of a Heideggerian vocabulary?

III.

Crucially, sense-certainty is not purely receptive. It starts out being so (in the initial part of its *dialectical constitution*) and eventually it gets locked into an experiential immediacy on the basis hereof (in its *being whole*); an immediacy which Hegelian 'consciousness' eventually evolves out of by perceiving the thing in relation to the many Here's

and Now's which the thing is ultimately taken to consist of (cf. §110, 66). Thus, what pertains to the 'essence' of sense-certainty as a dialectical phenomenon is an experiential discrepancy between, on the one hand, what is receptively perceived in immediacy and subsequently comprehended by means of concepts (e.g., "Now is night") and, on the other, a subsequent act of reaffirmation of the truth that "Now is night" that ends up being disconfirmed due to the fact that the I-thing relation, or Dasein, has changed in the meantime. Sense-certainty is an attitude which remains dependent on the subject's intentions; something which Heidegger (1994) also observes.

As to how sense-certainty is initially brought about we can conceive of it in relation to Heidegger's (2010a) underdeveloped notion of *de-distancing* [Ent-fernung]. De-distancing is an indispensable aspect pertaining to Dasein in the sense that bringing something near is fundamentally characteristic of Dasein's basic attitude of care (Heidegger 2010a, §23, 104). According to Heidegger, de-distancing pertains 'essentially' to Dasein's being-in-the-world (cf. §23, 105). Nearness should not be understood in the sense of bringing a thing physically near, but instead of bringing one or more things near for circumspection. An act of de-distancing is itself imbued with practical values and a history of past engagements since it de-distances what is at hand "in the surrounding world in a region previously discovered circumspectly" (§23., 105). Yet, as Heidegger also argues, space can indeed also be discovered either unthematically or devoid of circumspection as we simply look at it (§ 24, 109). So, in the case of the first moment of the original dialectical constitution of sense-certainty, Dasein can be said to bring near a particular sensuous given (e.g., 'the night', 'the tree'). This act of de-distancing is enabled by Dasein's understanding-driven comportment towards the thing.⁶ Indeed, Heidegger states that "Every bringing near has always taken a direction in a region beforehand..." and that de-distancing is "guided by the circumspection of heedfulness" (Heidegger 2010a, §23, 105). In other words, Dasein must have a tacit, pre-thematic understanding of the fact that night involves darkness and that

a tree typically consists of a trunk and some branches with leaves and, further, master the use of the relevant concepts (as universals). The certainty itself is what Hegel tacitly treats as the ‘connector’ between the experiencing subject, or I, and the thing (p. 59). In Heideggerian terms, the certainty becomes constitutive of Dasein’s caring in that particular moment and, as having been brought the thing near, Dasein lingers in its mediative relation with the object. Indeed, Hegel (1977) states: “The vanishing of the single Now and Here that we mean is prevented by the fact that I hold them fast” (§101, 61).⁷ And it concerns the fact that the subject is certain of the existence of the passively given thing which has been subsequently comprehended by means of universals (ibid., 58). In fact, as Hegel concludes his account on sense-certainty, the richness of our sensuous experiences escapes words and concepts in the sense that what we mean, or intend, in sense-certainty “cannot be reached by language” (§110, 66).

The second moment of sense-certainty is then Dasein’s attempt at re-evoking or re-affirming what was originally brought near and, hence, which would confirm the truth of the propositions that “Now is night”, “This is a tree” etc. The violation of the certainty comes about once Dasein discovers that the original act of de-distancing cannot be repeated given that that the sensuous given has undergone changes or has ceased to appear/exist. Consequently, Dasein ends up affirming its opposite: “Now is Day, not Night”. What allows for this disconfirmation of the original experience is that something of the original act is kept fast (to paraphrase Hegel) or, simply: it is re-enacted at later point. Indeed, Heidegger writes:

“It is true that Dasein can take the remoteness of something at hand from Dasein to be distance if that remoteness is determined in relation to a thing which is though as being objectively present at a place which Dasein has already occupied. Dasein can subsequently traverse the ‘between’ of this distance, but only in such a way that the distance itself becomes de-distanced” (Heidegger 2010a, §23, 105)

On my reading, the *traversing of distance* (or the de-distancing of a foregoing act of de-distancing) is precisely what Hegel takes the violated sense-certainty to express. It is a subsequent disconfirmation of something which has originally

been affirmed through our apprehension of what was given to us in passive receptivity.

As to the case of the being whole of sense-certainty we find that Dasein does not experientially withdraw from the perceived for a period of time but rather remains experientially engulfed in what it has just brought near. This entails that Dasein supersedes or ignores the mediative relation to the thing which was constitutive of having brought the thing near in the first place. Hegel (1977) explains why:

“This pure immediacy [...] no longer has any concern with the otherness of the ‘Here’, as a tree which passes into a ‘Here’ that is not a tree.... Its truth preserves itself as a relation that remains self-identical, and which makes no distinction of what is essential and what is unessential” (§104, 62)

So, the mediacy involved in the understanding-driven comportment is put aside as the thing comes to be experienced in an unmediated fashion through an immediate experiential flow. Indeed, as Hegel writes in this connection, “were we to examine this truth afterwards, or stand at a distance from it, it would lose its significance entirely” (§105, 63). In Heideggerian terms, it becomes a temporally prolonged staring which, in expressing a distance, or nearness, can always itself be distanced and, hence, come to lose its significance as we come to realize that our relation with the thing has changed.

NOTES

¹ In a critical essay, Gabriel has recently claimed that Heidegger’s overfocusing on this particular aspect of Hegel’s philosophy made him blind of the fact that Hegel actually proposes a particular methodology. Instead, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that Hegel is tied to a vulgar conception of time and, hence, that Hegel merely “looks at historical reality from a fundamentally Christian perspective for which all of historical reality moves toward an endpoint of revelation which is achieved in the Hegelian system” (Gabriel 2021, 355). Hegel basically questions the idea that the mind-independent world can be separated from its mind-dependent counterpart. Consequently, as Gabriel puts it, “Each of the shapes of consciousness discussed in the *Phenomenology* is an attempt to solve this problem by specifying a ratio of mind-dependence and mind-independence for a given paradigm case of intentionality.” (ibid., 354)

² Heidegger's attempt at a re-entry into the *Phenomenology* falls into the second of three overall attitudes adopted by Heidegger towards Hegel in his writings, namely the attempt at assimilating aspects of Hegel's thinking into Heidegger's own project (cf. Souche-Dagues 1992). As such, this attitude comes after Heidegger's dismissal of Hegel's conception of time as it was delivered in the Marburg lectures of 1914/15 and Heidegger's more constructive engagement with Hegel's *Science of Logic* in his 1957-lecture 'The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics'.

³ This relates to Heidegger's general criticism of Hegel's conception of time and, hence, his basic counterclaim in *Being and Time* which Surber summarizes in the following manner "Only because Dasein exists primordially as temporal in its concrete concerns can it become alienated from itself in an objective view of history and time as over against it and determining for it" (Surber 1979, 365). In other words, it is due to our basic, primordial being-in-the-world (qua Dasein) that something like a split between mind-dependent and mind-independent reality is possible in the first place.

⁴ Marder stresses that consciousness is thus assumed to involve the most relative kind of knowledge; "one where the absolute is at the furthest from itself and where it subsists in a negative modality of the 'not-absolute,' while remaining itself." (Marder 2021, 6)

⁵ Indeed, as Trisokkas observes, this relates to Hegel's understanding of Being which Hegel, according to Heidegger, understands as *presence-to-hand* in relation to sense certainty (Trisokkas 2022, 4).

⁶ Sloterdijk remarks that *de-distancing* pertains to Dasein's so-called "primary spatial embeddedness into the world" (Sloterdijk 2012, 36) and that it together with orientation (*Ausrichtung*) comprises the essential traits of Dasein's spatiality. As such, the phenomenon of spatiality was explored by Heidegger with the purpose of overcoming the Cartesian dualism and, hence, the idea that the world can be divided into material and thinking substances where the latter can "withdraw again into his worldless fortress of no extension" (ibid., 38). Indeed, as Sloterdijk observes, Heidegger's counterpoint is that Dasein is always-already world-involving meaning that "even cognition is only a specific mode of dwelling in the spaciousness (*Geräumigkeit*) of the world that is opened through circumspect heedfulness (*Besorgen*)" (ibid., 39).

⁷ As Sinnerbrink notes, Heidegger's criticism of Hegel for having adopted an "extreme formalization of time as a succession of Now moments" is not entirely warranted. Indeed, the fact that Hegel allows for the Now and Here of sense-certainty to eventually become a unity in Place critically demonstrates "the untenability of the abstract punctuality of the Now in the experience of *sense-certainty*." (Sinnerbrink 2007, 135)

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Ecology, Eco-phenomenology, and the Immanent Ethics of Nature

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Abstract

Like ecology, eco-phenomenology – a branch of environmental ethics claiming that the so-called “natural values” emerge spontaneously in our experience and seeking to draw ethical implications from this – tries to deal with the ecological crisis. However, the question still remains – even after almost 40 years of eco-phenomenology – in what sense a *phenomenological* ethics of nature is possible and what are these natural values. The article attempts to respond to these questions against the background of contemporary (eco-)phenomenology. Although it is still true that Husserl’s *Lebenswelt* is the source of all values, including those of nature, Husserl’s descriptions of the lifeworld must be replaced by more dynamic descriptions of contemporary phenomenology in France, which focuses on the “event feature” of appearing (*événementialité de l’apparaître*). The possibility of a phenomenological ethics of nature then seems to lie in what Deleuze sums up with the slogan: “to be worthy of the event”.

Keywords: eco-phenomenology, French phenomenology, environmental ethics, Gilles Deleuze, environmental crisis, natural values, transcendence, event

1. Introduction: ecology and ecological philosophy

When thinking about possible solutions to the current environmental crisis, we first and foremost turn to the greatest authority in this field – to ecology, i.e., an exact empirical science, part of biology, which studies the relationships between

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organisms and their environment. Ecology was first defined in the work of E. Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen* (Haeckel 1866), but its greatest development is associated with the second half of the 20th century and the rise of environmentalism as a broader social movement, newly awakened by an awareness of the need to protect nature and the environment, which human activity has begun to burden disproportionately. One of the pioneers of environmentalism was Rachel Carson, whose book *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962) describes the blindness of humanity, whose sole aim has become to increase agricultural yields without questioning the environmental impact of ever-newer and more drastic pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides, as well as intensive farming in general. Sixty years after the publication of her famous book, the situation has worsened in many ways. Ecologists speak of a huge catastrophe, not only the pollution of air, water, soil, and the bodies of various organisms with a variety of chemicals, but also the mass extinction of plant and animal species, the ozone hole, and global warming with the associated desertification, rising ocean levels, and mass migration. But they do not just stop at describing the problem based on “hard data”, e.g. on exact measurements of the amount of this or that substance in the bodies of organisms or in the atmosphere – they also offer precisely calculated predictions and solutions, which form the basis for concrete practical steps in the fight against the environmental crisis. For example, since it is now indisputable that human activity is behind global warming – as confirmed by the 2021 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,¹ which is based on thousands of scientific studies – almost all countries in the world agreed at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris to try to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to keep the average temperature rise on the planet below 1.5°C compared to the pre-industrial era.²

Ecology’s contribution thus seems unquestionable, and yet this science still struggles to put its proposed solutions into practice, both at the level of individual and social responsibility for the environment.³ The problem lies partly in the fact that the political establishment – which, alongside its various

ideologies, listens to its electorate and its concerns about the threat of deteriorating living standards – is still hesitant to take major steps and only willing to make significant compromises. What is worth noting here, in terms of the purpose of this article, is that this raises a whole new set of questions that go beyond the borders of ecology. And it is here that the space for other sciences, but also for ecological philosophy and eco-phenomenology opens up, a space for complementing objective knowledge that brings ecological philosophy to the forefront of addressing the environmental crisis. The aim of this introduction is not to define in detail the relations between ecology, ecological philosophy and eco-phenomenology, but to outline the field of eco-phenomenology and within it the main problems of this article. Some of the new questions, situated beyond the scope of ecological science, undoubtedly touch on human subjectivity, at least on how humans deal with objective (ecological) data and why they do so (in the name of what ideas or values). This realization lies behind Naess' famous distinction between the shallow ecology movement and the deep ecology movement: while the former technically addresses pollution or resource depletion (Naess 2017a, 218), the latter deals with the more complex causes of the ecological crisis, which includes the study of deeper human attitudes towards ecological issues: deep ecology "is supposed to suggest explication of fundamental presuppositions of valuation as well as of facts and hypotheses" (Naess 2017b, 222). As Evernden and after him Toadvine similarly suggest, despite the urgency of ecological issues, we should not consider them only as technological problems to solve, but instead what we need is thinking, deeper questioning exploring the attitudes and assumptions that lead us to label something as a (technological) problem, and even foreshadow how to solve it (Evernden 1999, xi-xii; Toadvine 2001, 73). To put it another way, such deep assumptions determine how we understand nature, our role in relation to it, or how we will act towards it. And it is precisely the absence of this scrutiny, says Evernden, that is behind the failure of ecological environmentalism as a movement striving for protecting nature and the environment in the 1970s: ecologists as experts in solving this or that ecological problem –

whose reputation was greatly enhanced by the aforementioned Carson's book – became part of the “management of the Earth”, which is primarily concerned with the general welfare and standard of *human* living (Evernden 1999, 8-9), which may be in line with the welfare of non-human beings, but often is *not*.⁴ Thus, the only sustainable strategy of environmentalism, he argues, must be to defend the intrinsic value of nature (independent on human interests), a value that is, however, absent from the official description of reality in which nature is primarily a useful resource (Evernden 1999, 13, 22-26). Therefore, he proposes that we redraw the map of reality, and that our actions be guided by a new one. In other words, our actions should be determined not by our beliefs about ourselves (planet managers) and what nature is (useful resource), but by what we actually encounter as nature – by our experience of nature free of all assumptions (Evernden 1999, 34). It is clear that phenomenology should play a major role in this, which Evernden illustrates mainly with Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty. Around the same time, E. Kohák takes the next step and undertakes his own original analyses of the “moral sense of nature”.⁵ Like most eco-phenomenologists, he rejects – puts into brackets – all previous theses, theories, assumptions, and presuppositions, including the naturalistic conception of nature, shared also by the empirical sciences and some other branches of environmental ethics, in which nature is understood as an extended matter governed by natural laws of causality.⁶ The problem with this approach is that nature has no value in itself, it is just a material machine describable mathematically whose meaning is derived from the personal preferences of this or that person (Kohák 2000, 67; Brown 2003, 7). In contrast to this Kohák's eco-phenomenology remains a phenomenology and as such focuses on a pure description of how nature itself and the “natural values” or “moral sense of nature” appear immediately in our experience, trying to show, in line with the intentions of environmental ethics, why the more-than-human world⁷ and its beings should be treated with a reverence and respect previously reserved only for humans (Kohák 1987, 212-213; cf. Kohák 2000, 2).

The crucial question, however, still is – despite the development of eco-phenomenology after Evernden and Kohák – what these “natural values” are. Indeed, isn’t value an economical concept referring to the exchange value of things and coming from the natural attitude that phenomenology must put into brackets? In what sense, then, do values grow out of phenomena? And in what sense is it possible to construct a *phenomenological* ethics of nature? Does it even make sense to speak of a phenomenological ethics if phenomenology is primarily a descriptive and not a normative discipline? To begin to respond to these central questions – whose answers go obviously beyond the scope of just one article – against the background of contemporary phenomenology, I will try to outline a phenomenological ethics of sensible nature based on Deleuze’s idea of immanent ethics, in which two hitherto rather disparate currents of contemporary phenomenology, based mainly (but not only) on the work of Merleau-Ponty, intersect: the American eco-phenomenology of sensible nature (Abram, Toadvine) and the French process phenomenology, which puts transcendence (of nature) at the centre of appearing (Maldiney, Richir, Marion, Barbaras, Romano).⁸ The aim of this article is of course not to discuss all three sources of inspiration in detail, but to update the questions raised above *in the context of contemporary phenomenology*. Although it is still true, in phenomenology, that Husserl’s *Lebenswelt* is the source of all values,⁹ including those of nature thematized in eco-phenomenology, Husserl’s descriptions of the lifeworld must be replaced by the even more dynamic descriptions of contemporary phenomenology in France, which focuses on the “event feature” of appearing (*événementialité de l’apparaître*). The possibility of a phenomenological ethics of nature then seems to lie in what Deleuze sums up with the slogan: “to be worthy of the event” (of nature). In what follows, I will thus describe the very basis of all the discussions on natural values, which is the experience of transcendent sensible nature giving itself as an event, which makes it an autonomous actor deserving of ethical treatment. In other words, it is the experience of respect for the otherness of nature around us that compels philosophy to extend ethics to non-human actors.¹⁰

2. An immanent ethics of the events – a phenomenological one?

The second section of this paper will begin with a short presentation of the Deleuzian immanent ethics of the event, which, as it seems to me, is an appropriate model for a phenomenological ethics of nature. Deleuze's transcendental empiricism – a thesis of pluralism of being that rejects pre-existent transcendental forms that would distribute our experience in the same way and make it into a repetition of the same – naturally extends into ethics, to be distinguished from morality telling us in advance what to do on the basis of some transcendental principles (e.g. Kant's categorical imperative). (cf., e.g., Deleuze 1995, 100-101; Deleuze 1998, 134-135). Since we ceaselessly become other, ethics cannot be a matter of pre-given principles, rules or values, but must instead relate to that which shakes them incessantly, i.e. the virtual or always singular becoming of our existence. It follows that rather than the Kantian question for the universal good (what should I do?), we should ask in Spinozian or Nietzschean terms: what can I do now? What am I now capable of? (cf. Smith 2011, 124-125; Smith 2013, 1242-1250). We should be, as Deleuze puts it, "worthy of the event" (Deleuze 1990, 149-150) for it is the event that brings us new existential possibilities for creating new forms of life. Being worthy of the event involves 1) the liberation of the event as such, i.e. beyond its spatiotemporal actualization (which Deleuze names "contra-actualization" of the event (Deleuze 1990, 150), and which is approximately equivalent to the phenomenological *ἐποχή*); 2) the necessity to represent the event at the level of empirical facts, to incorporate one of the new possibilities brought by it into the state of things (Deleuze 1990, 146-147; Deleuze 1995, 176). Deleuze and Guattari give a concrete example in their common text devoted to the pure event of May 68: The crisis experienced by the protesters after their failure is directly proportional to the failure to create the new welfare state they fought for, the new state of things based on the event of May 68 (Deleuze, Guattari 2006, 234-236).

But here one must ask at least three basic questions: 1) Is such ethics a *phenomenological* one? 2) Is not Deleuzian

ethics based on a metaphysical account of what “event” is? 3) And is “event” an appropriate term to describe (natural) phenomena? As for the first question, such a formulation of ethics may indeed appear at first glance to contradict phenomenology as a “descriptive science”: phenomenology does not prescribe, it only describes. But Deleuzian immanent ethics does as much: it is not a matter of a prescription of action on the basis of transcendental principles, but a philosophical clarification of reality as it is unproblematically given to us in everyday life (the level of actualized events in Deleuze, the world of natural attitude in Husserl). In other words, *the core of the ethics of the event is the ontological priority of one (phenomenological, dynamic) description of our existence over another (that of the natural attitude, or, everyday perception of the world)*, which is entirely consistent with Husserl’s idea of the phenomenological foundation of human empirical practice including that of sciences (cf. Husserl 1970, 340-341; Husserl 1981, 33). The core of the event ethics is not the necessity of some action (an event forces me to act in some way), but rather the possibility of being in accord with “real experience” of the world in its becoming, which in Deleuze leads to maximizing the power to act. This does not mean that the event completely loses any ethical force, i.e. the force that should compel the actor to act ethically. This power grows out of that ontological priority, and the author who has described it best in phenomenology was Levinas. He is the author of a descriptive ethics in which the encounter with an external singular being is at stake,¹¹ the encounter whose ethical force arises from the disruption of the Same, and not – similarly to Deleuze – from some general principles of morality. Listening to the other (and not interpret him according to commonly shared meanings), is the only possible response to the encounter with his “true transcendence”, which manifests itself in his “teaching”. For Levinas, this acceptance of the other ultimately results in a plurality of human society in which “one is responsible for oneself and for the Other” (Levinas 1979, 213). The essential difference between Levinas and what I will claim here is that this transcendence of the Other is only one example of an encounter with true transcendence that can also be attributed

to sensible nature (cf., e.g., Maldiney 1991, 315). The plural community or collective of which Levinas speaks would thus involve both human and non-human beings.¹²

And to respond to the second and third questions: contemporary French phenomenology seems to be an actualization of de Beistegui's (Deleuzian) idea of a phenomenology of difference that would be a phenomenology of becoming (de Beistegui 2000, 68). Of course, there are still some important differences between the Deleuzian and phenomenological "empiricism". David Abram summarizes the most important one when considering Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal: "As a phenomenologist, I am far too taken with lived experience – with the felt encounter between our sensate body and the animate earth – to suit his [Deleuze's] philosophical taste. As a metaphysician, Deleuze is far too given to the production of abstract concepts to suit mine." (Abram 2010, 10) In short, while phenomenology tries to stay very close to pre-scientific evidence of phenomena, however ephemeral they may be, situated on the boundaries of intentional phenomenology, Deleuze does not limit himself to *human* experience, and expresses himself in a post-structuralist or metaphysical language enriched (especially during his collaboration with Guattari) by that of various exact or human sciences. Nonetheless, these differences should not obscure the striking systematic proximity between Deleuze and contemporary French phenomenology. What is sometimes called "new French phenomenology" (Tengelyi 2012; Simmons, Bensons 2013) – i.e. phenomenology in France after the first reception of Husserl and Heidegger, approximately from 1960 onwards¹³ – constructs its plane of immanence similarly to Deleuze: the "plane of thought" of contemporary French phenomenology is, as it were, immersed in the Deleuzian plane by shifting the centre of the appearing from the subjectivity (Husserl, early Heidegger) to the other pole of the phenomenological correlation, i.e. to the transcendence that a) gives itself (as an event) and thus fully explains what appears to consciousness or to the first subjective pole of the correlation (Marion's phenomenology of givenness, or Barbaras' archi-movement of the world), and/or b) escapes and thus triggers the

unstoppable movement of the phenomenon as nothing but phenomenon (Richir).

However, by speaking of a new role of *transcendence*, are we not closing off the path toward the possibility of a phenomenological *immanent* ethics? Of course not. It is just the opposite: Only thanks to the new role of what in phenomenology appears as transcendence, only thanks to the openness of subjectivity to a transcendence irreducible to the transcendence of the constituted world (Husserl) or to the transcendence of the projection (early Heidegger), can we move within phenomenology onto the plane of *radical* immanence, to the plane of ontological becoming, which is broader than *subjective* immanence, and therefore open to other, non-human beings. In other words, the plane of thought of contemporary French phenomenology is that of immanence established by a radicalized *ἐποχή* (in comparison to that of Husserl), whose residue is not the Husserlian immanence, i.e. the absolute immanent being of lived experiences as opposed to the merely relative being of transcendence, but both together, the whole phenomenal field whose essential characteristic is that it is – in Patočka's words – “asubjective”.

One of the consequences of such radicalization is that contemporary French phenomenology is able to follow Deleuze and investigate the *real* (=virtual, pre-intentional, asubjective) conditions of intentional (actual) experience. To give a few examples: Marion explores the “infinite finitude” (*infinie finitude*) of the subjectivity (Marion 2016, 186), extending phenomenality to include saturated phenomena as the most real in our ordinary experience (saturated phenomena are free of everything that could limit their appearing, especially of all the conditions of *any possible* experience, and thus denote phenomena in their uniqueness); Richir, within his genetic phenomenology, describes the phenomenological field as a field of “concretenesses growing together” (*concrétudes en concrescence*) (Richir 2014, 32), always singular pre-intentional schemes of affectivity that constitute the real condition of intentional consciousness; or Romano, following Maldiney's investigations of the event, in his early work tries to overcome Heidegger and think being-in-the-world on the basis of the

event as always singular or real condition of its understanding (Romano 1998, 31-34).

Returning now to the possibility of an eco-phenomenological ethics inspired by Deleuze's ethics of the event, one must note that this radicalization of phenomenology, consisting in the exploration of the role of transcendence in the "constitution" of phenomena, reveals a radical phenomenological immanence that is nothing other than human being within sensible nature, and that it is here that the issue of immanent ethics intersects with that of eco-phenomenology. This needs to be explained in greater detail. As Toadvine writes, there are two contradictory conceptions of the human-nature relationship with which environmentalism works: 1) humans are not exceptional, they are part of nature; 2) humans are at the same time separated from nature, alienated, the most obvious consequence of which is the ecological crisis. Hence the paradox: how can we be part of nature and at the same time act against it? (Toadvine 2017b, 181-182) The specific phenomenological solution to this paradox relies on an analysis of our experience of nature: humans are part of nature, but also separate themselves from it through their (specific) bodies. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in *The Visible and the Invisible*, the seeing or, more generally, the perceiving subject must also be perceptible, it perceives precisely because it is a body that can itself be perceived (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 134 *sq.*). But it is exactly this materiality of the body, its situatedness within the material world, its thickness or depth, that makes any perception of the world only perspectival and therefore unable to grasp the entire depth of the perceived. Thus, the beginning of human alienation from nature is nothing but this situatedness of the human body as a "blind spot" (Toadvine 2017b, 195), which correlates with the notion of nature as transcendence.¹⁴ Accordingly, an immanent phenomenological ethics of nature would be an ethics of human being within sensible nature, an ethics of the relationship between humans and nature in which humans emerge within nature and can grasp it (or interact with it by means of perception, knowledge or action) *without ever reducing its transcendence*. It is this

transcendence that makes nature appear to contemporary phenomenologists as an event.

3. Nature as an event in a threefold sense

The followers of Merleau-Ponty (who, as everyone knows, did not complete his project of the ontology of the flesh due to his untimely death), whether those who have developed his ideas in American eco-phenomenology (mainly T. Toadvine or D. Abram in *Becoming Animal*) or those belonging to contemporary French (processual) phenomenology (H. Maldiney, M. Richir or R. Barbaras), describe how such transcendence manifests itself phenomenologically. One can distinguish at least three fundamental modes in which it appears, which consequently form modes on which an eco-phenomenological immanent ethics of (being worthy of) nature (as an event) can be built. In other words, nature appears as an event in a threefold sense:

1) Nature escapes or resists human control by its very material being. For example, according to Maldiney, it is the very material body of things, e.g. the body of a mountain, that gives itself as an event in the sense that it makes itself present only through the infinity of its perspectives, or rather it transcends all perspectives given in our experience, and therefore it has no identity, it is not an object, but the transcendent background of all our sensations in which it always makes itself newly available (Maldiney 1973, 223-226, 230). According to Abram or Kohák, it is this “mere existence” (Abram 2010, 49) that deserves human respect, it is enough just to be, there is no need for it to be of any use to us (Kohák 1987, 95-96). This does not mean that the material body of non-human beings is merely a passive mass of resistance. Abram rightly affirms that the mountain *lives* in the sense of actively defining the mood of the whole place, gathering other beings in its shadow or interacting with the senses of the walker who adapts his stride to the slope of the mountain terrain (Abram 2010, 47-49). Matter as such of the mountain is an activity calling out and gesturing towards others, as well as organizing the space around it (Abram 2010, 47-49). Similarly, Barbaras says that the stone inhabits the

world in its own way: by condensing it within itself, and thus going beyond its own extended visible mass – like those high places on hills or mountains that let the earth communicate with the sky, as if the whole world has crystallized into a single point within them (Barbaras 2019, 31-35). According to both Abram and Barbaras, such *gathering* of the world around the bodies (of non-human beings) is a primitive form of consciousness or intelligence that forms the basis for specifically human consciousness. Both can even be credited with the thesis that human consciousness or awareness is only a part of the awareness of nature: the basis of human consciousness is the creativity of the living perceiving body, which evolved in the process of evolution within nature, and whose conscious contents consist of nothing but the consequences of the encounter between the human body and the body of the Earth.¹⁵

This all sounds quite trivial, for we all know that material nature is that which is itself at least indifferent to human intentions or resists them, which testifies to its independence. But how many times do we treat a mountain or a forest on its slope as if it were not there at all, as if seeing only ski slopes from the onset? This and similar cases show that in our natural attitude we forget the otherness of nature, and therefore it is the task of phenomenologists to recall it. However, this short analysis of transcendence of both animate and inanimate material beings and things, including artificial ones, i.e. their pure material existence, seems to be insufficient for an immanent phenomenological ethics of nature since it is obviously characterized by more than its materiality.

2) Nature resists human control and calls for our respect insofar as it is spontaneous being in the sense of Greek *φύσις*, i.e. the living being bringing itself into presence on its own initiative (cf. Zimmerman 2003, 82). Nature is understood as the world in its phenomenological sense, i.e. the context of our lives which retains its transcendence. In Toadvine's words: the world is the clear context and background of our everyday lives, the connective tissue of things and events that gives them meaning, but which is part of a larger nature that is connected to the obscure and uncontrollable (Toadvine 2017b, 194). And

this uncontrollable is proving to be alive. As pointed out in another text by Toadvine (with reference to Merleau-Ponty), the living material body of nature, encompassing our own living bodies, forms the so-called elemental immemorial past that we carry within us and yet do not completely control – we cannot fully consciously experience, for example, the biological aspect of our bodies involving such organic rhythms as the heartbeat (Toadvine 2014b, 274-277). The elemental is the source of a “productivity which is not ours, although we can use it – that is, an originary productivity that continues [to operate] beneath the artificial creations of man” (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 125, quoted by Toadvine 2021, 135). In other words, everything elemental encountered by us is an expression of an interiority that is not our own, but which belongs to nature. As the early Patočka points out, such interiority is an expression of the broader movement of nature in which we merely participate (Patočka 2014, 94, 99). The elemental constitutes what might be called “pure nature,” or, according to Merleau-Ponty, wild animal being that circulates in and around us (Toadvine 2021, 135).

3) Finally, nature can defy humans by appearing as a major revolutionary event, as a natural catastrophe whose spontaneity as *φύσις* often becomes violent with regard to humans. Levinas writes about the uncertainty and danger of life within the elements (Levinas 1979, 137) and Maldiney and Romano thematize such natural catastrophes as events that shatter both our individual and social lives. It is only in such existential crisis, says Maldiney, that the existent, struck by his impotence, “suddenly experiences his unjustification, that of a finite being that can only understand itself in its relation to a foundation that it ignores, and whose finitude can only be maintained through the intermediary of a transcendence in which it is immersed” (Maldiney 2001, 91).¹⁶ It is the dark side of the Openness of appearing that gives rise to the event in which the Nothingness of absolute transcendence (the non-being of nature) passes into being, in the form of a natural disaster, for example (Maldiney 2001, 106-109; Maldiney 2012, 204).

As Maldiney and Romano as well as Deleuze and Guattari put it, the only possible way to be worthy of such event, to solve such an existential crisis coming from nature's insurmountable transcendence is to change or to transform ourselves and to understand the world and our own place in it anew, i.e. according to the new existential possibilities brought by the event (Maldiney 1991, 320; Romano 1998, 200-201). The ecological crisis seems to be *the* event of all events: it manifests the transcendence of nature by showing us the far-reaching tragic consequences of human actions that have not respected other minor events and signs of nature's otherness. The only sustainable strategy with regard to all the events, including that of the ecological crisis, is to forget the dream of becoming "masters and possessors of nature" and to start respecting it as at least an equal partner, i.e. to start listening to what it tells us. Of course, what this exactly means is a large complex question. The unpredictability of events does not relieve us of the responsibility to calculate, plan, anticipate, and devise responses to all sorts of potential threats, but we must also accept that the future cannot be built on calculations and that there are clear limits to our planning (Toadvine 2017c, 227-230; Abram, Hine 2011, 7). At the very least, we should expect that our calculations may be wrong and that there must be sufficient room for correction. If we were to commit to a complete revolution, which has already begun in several countries such as Bolivia and Ecuador in the field of the rights of nature, it would mean placing the being of nature (materially autonomous and creative being of *φύσις*) on the level of humans. This does not mean, of course, that it should have all the rights that humans have: non-human beings should have rights corresponding to their being and capabilities, so not, for example, the right to express themselves freely (animals or rivers do not speak), but the right to be represented by any human being in court if their "mere existence" is threatened, as is already case in Ecuador. In any case, it is necessary to develop our sensitivity to the transcendence of a more-than-human nature and the related flexibility of the whole society that would be able to cope with crisis situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In this regard, it is no coincidence that the

concept of resilient society, defined by these very attributes, is now being promulgated across many exact and non-exact scientific disciplines, including ecology (cf., e.g., Ungar 2021).

4. Conclusion

The goal of the present article has been to outline a phenomenological ethics of nature that could play an important role in the burning issue of the environmental crisis. To this end, it has first discussed the specific role of eco-phenomenology in relation to ecology: 1) it puts into brackets all the prejudices on which human conceptions of nature and their relationship to it may stand; 2) it does not restrict itself to reasons and argumentation but considers the “natural values” as emerging immediately before us. The fundamental questions were what these natural values are and in what sense a phenomenological ethics of nature is possible. To begin to answer them against the background of contemporary phenomenology, the article proposed a phenomenological ethics of sensible nature based on Deleuzian immanent ethics, in which the element of all “natural values” is nature appearing within the world of our life (*Lebenswelt*) where no one doubts its value. The first step of eco-phenomenological ethics of nature is not a specific enumeration of the values of nature, but the definition of the original field in which all discussions of values can take place: the “natural values” of eco-phenomenology are not at first clearly defined values that can be measured against each other or against other values – eco-phenomenology puts into brackets all values in order to discover their source, which is their lived experience, of which the relationship to the more-than-human nature is a part. Here nature is not only distant scientific data or predictions based on it, but an admirable spontaneity (*phusis*) that permeates life all around us, including our own bodies. More precisely, nature appears as a transcendent event in at least three basic ways: a) through its merely material existence; b) through its spontaneity or productivity (*φύσις*); and c) through catastrophic events reconfiguring human existential possibilities. The ethics summed up by the slogan “to be worthy of the event of nature” can take many forms, from leaving enough room for corrections in our calculations to the

protection of animals or to the formulation of the rights of nature, but its cornerstone is the conviction that nature in the sense of *φύσις* is an autonomous and creative force that must be treated in accordance with its own transcendent being.

To conclude, I would like to point out the limits not only of the preceding considerations, but of phenomenological analyses of the ecological crisis in general. If phenomenology is right and there are “natural values” or “moral sense of nature” immediately appearing in our experience of nature, we should now ask as follows: What happens, for example, between our emotional response to the suffering of male chickens in the egg industry and our purchase, the very next day, of eggs from mass production of the egg industry at our local supermarket? What happens between our sympathy for the sinking islands in the Pacific Ocean, and our continued engagement in driving cars, flying, and other activities that produce unsustainable amounts of CO₂ in the atmosphere? These questions indicate that the ecological crisis is much deeper than might meet the phenomenological eye: not only are we often indifferent to the reasons why we should heed the warnings of ecologists, we might even become indifferent to our own (phenomenological) experience of suffering of other human or non-human beings. Phenomenology is not completely helpless in the face of such questions: together with Husserl or Richir, it can speak of a crisis of the phenomenological sense, which is overlaid by symbolic thinking that tries to define it and identify it, which results in an eclipse of natural values under layers of different symbolic interpretations, such as the ideology of consumerism that homogenizes our experience and choices by forcing us to choose from pre-given options.¹⁷ It is true that “phenomenologically” we are still able to decide freely and put all symbols aside, but only few people are able to do so. This means that for a thorough philosophical analysis of the environmental crisis, a phenomenological analysis will not suffice – it will have to consider other non-phenomenological factors, such as the power and specific functioning of this or that symbol, such as the aforementioned ideology of consumerism.

Despite these limits, eco-phenomenology is not useless: whatever obscures natural values, such as natural respect for nature's otherness, the task of all sustainable solutions to the environmental crisis seems to be to rediscover them, to rediscover what has always been inherent in us – sensitivity in relation to more-than-human nature. If Gérald Hess is right, and the task of environmental ethics is to combine the eco-phenomenological realm of lived experience (as a basis of values), rational justification (critical discussion of values, including the aforementioned issues that go beyond eco-phenomenology), and political engagement (Hess 2018, 108), then the contribution of eco-phenomenology is its cornerstone. Even if people did not discuss the value of nature at all, even if they lived in socio-economic systems that suppress or at least obscure these values, the world of our lives would remain an area of permanent possibility of revolution, in which nature appears as an autonomous partner of humans, forcing us to discuss its ethical value and engage politically on its behalf.

NOTES

¹ The paragraph A.1 of the Panel's sixth assessment report, which began publication in August 2021, says: "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred." (Masson-Delmotte et al. 2021, 4)

² This is the temperature threshold at which irreversible climate change will be triggered, with far-reaching impacts on the lives of all kinds of organisms, including humans.

³ It is now clear that some countries and private companies are not honouring their commitments from the Paris conference. In response to the release of the above-quoted report, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, said the following: "We are on a fast track to climate disaster: Major cities under water. Unprecedented heatwaves. Terrifying storms. Widespread water shortages. The extinction of a million species of plants and animals. This is not fiction or exaggeration. It is what science tells us will result from our current energy policies. We are on a pathway to global warming of more than double the 1.5-degree limit agreed in Paris. Some government and business leaders are saying one thing – but doing another. Simply put, they are lying. And the results will be catastrophic." (United Nations 2022)

⁴ Kohák similarly describes this attitude as the "posture of mastery" (cf. Kohák 2000, 68) which grew out of the Cartesian dream of becoming "masters and possessors of nature" (Descartes 2006, 50) or the biblical "fill the earth,

subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all living things" (*Genesis* 1:28). Even this attitude, which has largely contributed to the ecological crisis, can lead to the formulation of an environmental ethics: mastery over nature can be combined with responsibility and care for it. What is problematic about such care, however, is that it still – after all the discoveries of evolutionary biologists and others, and after all the democratic revolutions of the 19th and 20th centuries – presupposes the exceptional position of humans among the other beings of this planet. It is here – also according to Evernden – that the main reason for the failure of environmentalism is found: the prioritization of human interests over the interests of nature.

⁵ A term coined by Erazim Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars, A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature*. It was this book published in 1984, and also Neil Evernden's *The Natural Alien* (1985), that probably began the history of eco-phenomenology. This history is, of course, preceded by various phenomenological investigations of nature or natural phenomena, but not explicitly linked to the theme of the ecological crisis.

⁶ According to Toadvine, eco-phenomenology defines itself in opposition to naturalism, placing itself outside the mainstream of environmental ethics (Toadvine 2017a, 176). However, some authors, e.g. D. Wood, seek to bring eco-phenomenology and naturalism closer together (see Wood 2001, 78-95).

⁷ Term coined by David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous, Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (Abram 1997).

⁸ While Deleuze's philosophy and especially his and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal have already attracted attention in eco-phenomenology (cf., e.g., Abram 2011 or Toadvine 2014a), the opposite is the case with contemporary French phenomenology and the phenomenological notion of the event which is only slowly beginning to enter into eco-phenomenological discussions (see, e.g., Gilliland 2021).

⁹ Recall that Husserl addressed this question repeatedly, for example in his recurrent reflections on phenomenology as the first philosophy or the phenomenological foundation of the sciences (including ecology) which is explicitly addressed in the third volume of his *Ideen* (see Husserl 1980; cf., e.g., Kohák 1987, 22-26; Kohák 2003, 20).

¹⁰ This is certainly not the only possible kind of eco-phenomenological ethics. A different kind of ethics might, for example, be based not on the autonomy of nature, on its independence from us, but on what we share with it, i.e. on the fact that we are sensually related to it, that it is the source of the satisfaction of our basic needs, that we live from it, etc. An example of such ethics might be David Abram's eco-phenomenology of sensuous kinship with nature in *The Spell of the Sensuous*. In contrast to this type of ethics, this article will attempt to outline an ethics of nature based on its transcendence, i.e. on that which escapes all bodily intentions, that which far transcends our bodily communication with the familiar faces of things, and transforms human subjectivity into an insatiable desire for nature. This conception of subjectivity as desire is shared by many contemporary phenomenological thinkers such as Richir, Barbaras or Toadvine (cf. Richir 2010; Barbaras 2008, 2011; Toadvine 2003) Any other foundation of ethics seems to be

directly undermining such ethics by converting – to put it in Levinas’ terms – the Other into the Same. If an ethics of nature is not to be left to the contingency of the good will of the human subject (Benso 2000, xxxviii), it must stand firmly on the respect for nature’s otherness, on its transcendence or resistance to human reason.

¹¹ “Moral consciousness is not an experience of values, but an access to external being.” (Levinas 1990, 293)

¹² Let us add here that some of the Levinasian interpreters similarly attempt to attribute a face to non-human beings (see, for example, Benso 2000; Diehm 2003).

¹³ It is Janicaud who situates new French phenomenology around this period (Janicaud 2000, 16–17).

¹⁴ It needs to be added that the whole extent of human alienation from nature is linked not only to the human body as a body, but to its species-specificity. As the main features of the human body involved in the specifically human form of experience, one can mention e.g. bipedia, neoteny, or the unspecialized hand (cf., e.g., Barbaras 2011, 170-173). As for the specificity of human mind, it needs to be said that beginning with Husserl, phenomenology deals with the essences of the human mind, including the temporality of consciousness with its retentions and protentions, associations, *habiti*, language, abstract or symbolic thought, etc.

¹⁵ Abram states this explicitly (Abram 2010, chap. Mind); Barbaras develops a theory according to which the human body, as the site of consciousness, is born in a so-called *archi-event* of the deflagration (*archi-événement de la déflagration*) in which the world disintegrates into the multiplicity of beings, with part of its power passing to them, which is the fundamental source of their movement of phenomenalization – of their becoming-conscious (Barbaras 2019, 72-73).

¹⁶ “[L’existant] éprouve soudain son injustification, celle d’un être fini qui ne peut se comprendre que dans son rapport à un fondement qu’il ignore, et dont la finitude ne peut s’entretenir que de l’intermédiaire d’une transcendance dans laquelle elle s’abîme.”

¹⁷ Richir sees the reason not only for the environmental crisis but for the general crisis of humanity in the fact that what he calls “symbolic institution” (*institution symbolique*) overlaps the self-generation of the phenomenological sense (*sens se faisant*) (cf., e.g., Richir 1990). The institution is called “symbolic” because it is the symbol that integrates heterogeneous parts of the process of the self-generation of the sense. Since humans are “symbolic animals”, everything in their experience, being, action, beliefs, thinking, is coded by various cultural symbolic systems of languages, practices, techniques, etc. (cf., e.g., Richir 2018, 458-464; Richir 2015, 247).

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A Contemporary View of the Planetary Oikos through the Prism of Technology and Management

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Abstract

According to Aristotle, man is by nature a *physei politikon zoon* – a political creature and, simultaneously, *zoon logon echon* and *zoon oikonomikon*. Our interest in this paper is *zoon oikonomikon* and the related concept of *oikos*. We argue that today, in the epoch of the Anthropocene and the modern technology managing it, Aristotle's idea of *Oikos* needs to be updated and transferred from the level of the local community of people to the global level of humanity living on planet Earth. We propose to apply Aristotle's thesis – technology imitates nature, technology completes what nature has started, and technology produces new ones – to the concepts of habitat, *Oikos* and household management. Here, technology imitates nature in completing, completing the habitat created by nature for the species *Homo sapiens*, and at the same time, it also produces a new habitat in virtual space. Building on the results of the analysis of the essence of technology according to Heidegger, Stiegler, Ellul and others, we introduce the concept of the Planetary *Oikos* situated in a hybrid space. At the end of the paper, we discuss the possible future development of the Planetary *Oikos* concept depending on the further development of technology, especially artificial intelligence.

Keywords: *oikos*, planetary *oikos*, habitat, household management, technology, real space, virtual space, hybrid space

Introduction

Aristotle primarily defined man as *zoon logon echon*, i.e. an animal standing above other herd-like animals (Aristotle

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divides animals, according to their way of life, into herd-like, solitary and both). It is a being that knows how to use reason and can learn about the world of which it is a part by listening and expressing the result of this knowledge in words (Aristotle 2019, 53-55). But Aristotle's man is also a *physei politikon zoon* – an animal politician, destined for a life in the community: "Whoever cannot live in community, or does not need anything for his self-sufficiency, is not part of the community, is either an animal or a god." (Aristotle 2019, 51-53) While other political animals are and cooperate only instinctively, man, from a nature independent of him, strives to achieve a specific purpose, a particular goal – the ultimate good – *eudaimonia*. It is a state of perfection, bliss, which a person needs for their own sake and not for something else (Aristotle 2012). However, a person's ability to achieve *eudaimonia* is conditioned by his opportunities to freely develop political and economic activities, as well as by his status – single or unfree and especially by his ability to use reason (*logos*) to distinguish good from evil and justice from injustice. Every human community is created to achieve a particular good. In the following, we will focus only on the community in economic matters – *Oikos*, where man manifests himself as an economic animal – *zoon oikonomikon*. *Oikos* is "a community formed in harmony with nature for everyday coexistence". In it, as in a biological community, a man and a woman need each other biologically for reproduction, and further, in a property community, (by nature free) rulers and (by nature subordinate) ruled-enslaved people to maintain economic self-sufficiency are united in it. These two communities – biological and property – form the backbone of the *Oikos* concept. It is then further enveloped by ties and relationships, naturally arising inside the *oikos*, as well as ties and relationships created outward from the *Oikos* (Aristotle 2019, 49).

The paper aims to show that Aristotle's concept of *Oikos*, which arose in a particular time, a specific space and a certain state of technology, must be managed today as a Planetary *Oikos*. Modern technology plays a crucial role in this transformation. We analyze its effect on the form of the concept "*Oikos*" mainly through the prism of Heidegger's (2004) and

Stiegler's (2016) views on the relationship between technology and nature.

Constructing the concept of the Planetary Oikos brings with it several challenges related to the definition of the Planetary Oikos as a habitat, or home, identifying the form of its users, the form of relationships and ties existing in the Planetary Oikos and determining the condition of property that should be part of the Planetary Oikos.

The paper is organized as follows: first, we discuss Aristotle's concept of Oikos and identify its essential elements, based on which, subsequently, using the analogy, we design the features of the Planetary Oikos concept. We analyze the forces leading to the emergence of the Planetary Oikos and its characteristics. Furthermore, in the context of new, technology-generated spaces and environments, we discuss the Planetary Oikos as a habitat spread out in both natural and virtual space (Chalmers 2019). Similarly, we move from the concept of home in real space to the idea of home in real-virtual space to finally arrive at the image of the Planetary Oikos as an ecological niche created using human-for-human technology in a hybrid space (de Souza e Silva 2006, 261-278; van den Akker 2018). In conclusion, based on the analysis of the current impact of technology on the evolution of the Oikos concept, we consider its possible future forms, including the form of a universal Oikos for organic and inorganic species and their hybrids.

1. Aristotle's Oikos concept

Aristotle projected his observation that man, whom he initially characterized as "zoon logon echon" – a rational creature, is by nature both a political (physei politikon zoon) and an economic (zoon oikonomikon) creature into the concepts of "Oikos" and "polis". These two concepts comprehensively frame an individual's life and his coexistence with other people in the broader context of the cosmic order "cosmos" (Aristotle 2020). In this chapter, we start from Aristotle's Politics I, especially from the first and third chapters, which are entirely devoted to managing the household (Oikos). We meet the concept of Oikos in Aristotle, Plato, Xenophon, Herodotus, the Stoics and others. They all lived in a world that existed and was

perceived as a human-accessible, philosophically graspable world.

A man carries out his activities in two types of community: in the political community, represented by the concept of polis, and in the economic community, represented by the idea of Oikos. Oikos is created to ensure economic self-sufficiency. The mission of the Oikos is to solve the problem of effectively satisfying the basic needs of an economically autonomous unit of ancient society – ensuring food, shelter, safety and privacy for the family or household. Oikos, by nature, covers three types of relationships: the biological connection and the man-woman, which pursues the goal of ensuring the reproduction of the species. The relationship between father-children guarantees the transfer of knowledge (Trubody 2013, 315-335), and the master-slave relationship (as a souled part of the property that belongs, by nature, to another and which participates in reason only by perceiving it but does not have itself). The effort for economic self-sufficiency to ensure a good life for a person must be distinguished from their attempt to accumulate wealth for the sake of wealth themselves. The so-called profitable art is natural only insofar as it is limited to using fruits and animals that nature provides to man (Aristotle 2019, 59-77).

From another point of view, the Oikos concept, therefore, integrates spatial reality, social reality and social relations, household, family, kinship, property and ownership concerns, and last but not least, the mechanism of effective management of the Oikos. The practical implementation of the Oikos consisted mainly of a dwelling for a limited number of people - primarily members of close ones or even more distant families living in the same household. Furthermore, living and inanimate property created and maintained the economic self-sufficiency of the Oikos – enslaved people, animals, fields, farm buildings, tools, etc. However, Oikos also functioned as support for partner and family relationships, children's education, horizontal, vertical and intergenerational transfer of knowledge, the development of economic and political relations with its surroundings, etc. The operation of the Oikos comprehensively, i.e. on the economic and political sides,

managed the oikonomus. Individual realizations of the Oikos concept differed in details and were entities, each characterized by its spirit of place. At the same time, Oikos fulfilled the conceptual features of the home.

The concept-forming elements of the Oikos are thus: a person (man/woman, their offspring), relationships and bonds (social, property, economic, political), roles, especially the role of the oikonomus, house (in the sense of the ancient Greek oikia) – dwellings, providing for the members of the Oikos community privacy and security, property (animate/inanimate, necessary to ensure the operation of the Oikos). Aristotle's oikos is set in the natural environment of the "free expanse" of real space.

Even if Aristotle does not explicitly list the initial conditions that must be fulfilled for the concept of Oikos to become a reality, we can implicitly derive them from the texts of Politics I, Eudemus Ethics, Nicomachean Ethics and the Historia Animalium (Greek *Ton peri ta zoia*). In our opinion, they are:

- the existence of an environment suitable for human life, i.e. the existence of actual physical space (RFP), biosphere, nature (Vernadsky 1978, 2004),
- the ability of man (with the help of technology) to change part of the RFP (biosphere, nature) into his habitat, his ecological niche,
- the heart of man to create community, including economic community,
- a person's ability to communicate/understand each other (speech),
- division of labour and mastery of hierarchical management,
- a numerically small number of members of the Oikos,
- a small geographical area limited to the house, farms and adjacent land,
- private ownership of animate and inanimate property, vertical binding to the polis.

2. The Planetary Oikos

The philosophical need to create the concept of "the Planetary Oikos" results from changes in man's position

concerning nature and technology, changes in the effect of technology on the heart, and changes in the mutual place of the concepts of Oikos – polis concerning each other. Man and his technology have become a geological force competing with nature. The search for an answer to the question of the continued existence of the Oikos for man makes sense to search only at the planetary level.

Paraphrasing Aristotle, let's define the Planetary Oikos as "a global community formed following the nature of everyday coexistence with the planet." Although the concept of "Planetary Oikos" implicitly refers to the planet Earth and the Anthropocene, it practically refers to the philosophical idea of "world" rather than the physical concept of "planet". In Sloterdijk's words, "Earth can be understood as a habitat, an Oikos ", ... as "a stage on which the play of geo-forces unfolds" (Sloterdijk 2017, 310). The reality today appears to be the result of the play of the geological force of nature and the geological force of man. With his inappropriate behaviour and inappropriate management of the Planetary Oikos, the consequence of which will be the loss of the conditions for the existence of the biosphere, man can bring about the end of himself and the end of the Planetary Oikos (Zwier and Blok 2019, 621-646). The long-term existence of the Planetary Oikos is thus decided by the web of global economic, political, cultural and social relations operating against the background of the concept of man as a geological force. The cardinal problem of the increasingly unstable Planetary oikos is mainly the absence of its effective management (Lemmens, Blok and Zwier 2017, 114-126; Lemmens and Yuk 2017, 26-41). The salvation of Sloterdijk's "stage" thus depends on the script that one writes for the play performed on it, on the direction of the play itself, and especially on how one handles the leading role in this play (Sloterdijk 2017, 310).

As an analogy to the set of concept-forming elements of Aristotle's Oikos, let us first create a set of concept-forming elements of the Planetary Oikos. Practically, we are looking for analogies to the elements of a person, house (or dwelling), property, relationships and bonds and the role of the oikonomist. The analogy to the central element of Aristotle's

Oikos – man – is again man, but this time man as a member of humanity. Compared to the man of Aristotle's Oikos, we see a quantitative and qualitative shift – from a creature of the “*zoon logon echon*” type to a technologically augmented (augmented) man, from a small number of individuals selected according to a specific key (kinship relationship) to the totality of all people on planet Earth without additional selection conditions. It is a mass of people, an entity that Aristotle does not consider concerning the Oikos. Humanity as a group plays the role of members of the Planetary Oikos. Anonymous individuals are transformed into a group of people by a common need or goal: consumption. In the Planetary Oikos, two types of management arise: traditional, taken from Aristotle's Oikos, and new, resulting from the character of the Planetary Oikos as a complex, geographically spread self-organizing system covering the entire planet. For the new type of management, humanity is not a suitable choice to fill the role of oikonomist of the Planetary Oikos. Instead, the ratio of the Planetary Oikos corresponds to the oikonomus in the form of collective reason, intelligence, and wisdom. However, even though modern technology supports creating an environment where each category can be cultured, as in a petri dish, none is fully developed. The role of the planetary oikonomist thus remains, as a secondary role, on man – a herd-like creature. Regarding man's role in shaping history, Arendt believes that “... human endeavours shape history, though we cannot say that men fabricate it” (Novák 2010, 481-504). As for the relations and bonds between individuals (social, property, economic, political), in the concept of the planetary Oikos, their character changes: social links are mainly created through mediation, property relations are privatized, and economic and political ties are globalized.

The Planetary Oikos concept also differs from Aristotle's Oikos by erasing the boundaries between the Oikos and polis. There is only one Planetary Oikos on Earth, to which all the planet's population belongs. The solution to the problem of survival at the family level is thus inextricably linked to the problem of survival at the level of the *homo sapiens* species. Thus, the role of the Oikos is combined with the part of the

polis, at the level of which the problem of environmental preservation must be solved.

The digital information and communication branch of modern technology informs the environment in which the Planetary Oikos is situated. A new domain of virtual space is added to the field of real space. The Planetary Oikos is thus spread over both spaces. Then by analogy with the house, or the dwelling, which ensures privacy, security and conditions for a good life for the members of Aristotle's Oikos, is in real space, and in a narrowly anthropic sense, the so-called cultural environment, i.e. natural environment modified by technology according to human needs. In a broader context, it is the biosphere of planet Earth as the home of living matter on planet Earth. In a virtual environment, an analogy to a house is the entire digital virtual space. The key to it is the right of access to the virtual space.

Similarly, an analogy to property (animate/inanimate, necessary to ensure the running of Aristotle's Oikos) is "property", essential to ensure the running of the Planetary Oikos. In real space, it is Earth, water, and air. The so-called planetary commons should manage this property. Commons is generally characterized by "a plurality of people (communities) sharing the same resources and managing them and their relations and (re)production processes through horizontal co-management". The concept of the municipality deviates from the Western culture of the preferred public-private dichotomy (or public-private ownership), and its implementation at the planetary level requires the creation of a planetary municipality management mechanism (Helfrich and Haas 2009). In virtual space, Earth, water, and air are replaced by "cyberspace as the space of the spirit" (Barlow 2019, 5-7).

Finally, the analogy to the ultimate goal of Aristotle's Oikos – the economic self-sufficiency of a small community of people – is the long-term sustainable development of the Planetary Oikos and the long-term survival of man on planet Earth under the conditions of Heidegger's modern technology.

Next, we will develop the concept of the Planetary Oikos in terms of its synonymous meanings habitat (as a planetary house) and home.

3. The planetary habitat

In general, the word “habitat” refers to the resources and physical and biotic factors present in a specific geographical area, which create the conditions for the survival and reproduction of a particular species. We discuss the planetary habitat in the context of the species “man” and generally in the context of all forms of “living matter”.

The effect of modern technology and man concerning his planetary habitat was defined by Heidegger (2004) as *Gestell*. It is “that extortionate claim which concentrates one to bargain what is uncovered as usable stock/useful stock”. *Gestell* hides in himself the danger of a calculative approach to nature when “this recovery takes place in such a way that the released energy is hidden in nature, the released energy is transformed, what is created by this transformation is accumulated, the accumulated is divided again, and the divided is transformed again.” The power of modern technology it gradually begins to prevail over the power of nature: “nature, which seems to stand above and against technology, is already placed in the position of usable stock.” (Heidegger 1977, 40) Especially since the beginning of the so-called great acceleration, observable since 1945, modern technology has become a geological force, confronting the process of shaping the planetary habitat of humanity, nature as a whole (Stiegler 2016; Zwier, Zwier and Blok 2017, 222-242). Society no longer knows about its habitat, and according to Heidegger, in the conditions of modern technology, it cannot approach anything other than in a calculative way. Thus, the question of how to preserve the planet Earth as a habitat for humans in the future becomes topical. We can find inspiration in Aristotle’s statement, “A dinner to which many contribute is better than a dinner paid for by one purse,” in other words, decisions taken together are better than decisions of only the rich, only the good, or the conclusion of one best man or tyrant. The answer to the cardinal question of humanity’s survival must therefore be the result of its collective decision-making. The problem of preserving the planetary habitat cannot be solved by adopting particular local solutions at the ontic level. Humanity’s assumption of responsibility for the planetary habitat at the

ontic level is insufficient from the point of view of the “call of the Anthropocene” at the ontological level for the sustainable management of the planet.

Man and technology are two interacting entities (Stiegler 1998, 137). Man influences the development of technology, which in turn affects the further development of man’s possibilities and the form of the biophysical environment (habitat) in which the Planetary Oikos is situated: “Technology, and especially the way it affects the energy play of entropy and negentropy in the biosphere, frames the matrix of all ideas about the Planetary Oikos, habitat (The approximations of the ancient Greek word “Oikos” used today are household, domestic environment, habitat, house. We distinguish Oikos as a framework that ensures the development of an individual and the local human community associated with him from a habitat that provides the conditions necessary for the existence of a certain species, including the species *homo sapiens*.) and the laws in force there.” (Stiegler 2017, 129-150)

We will present the mentioned matrix of ideas about the relationship between technology and the planetary habitat of man through Aristotle’s classification of the roles of technology – “technology imitates nature, technology completes, or it completes what nature has begun, and technology produces something new that nature cannot produce” (Aristotle 2010). In the context of a planetary habitat, technology plays all three roles. Nature generally provides a habitat for all species existing on Earth. Technology imitates it and simultaneously complements, completes and expands the habitat for humans in the environment of real space and produces a new habitat for them in the environment of virtual space. The thesis “technology imitates nature” should be understood on the general level of pursuing the purpose: The rational process of producing things by technology for human purposes corresponds to the teleological process of creating something by nature for its purposes. This method of imitation does not exclude technological creativity in producing new products, procedures and goals. As Engelmeyer (1911) stated at the beginning of the last century, “Animals passively adapt to the existing natural environment.

Conversely, man adapts the natural environment to his needs with the help of technology.” By imitating the procedures of nature, technology in the natural environment “expands the ecological niche for humanity” (Ellis 2015, 287-331), optimizes the planetary habitat for human needs. However, since the existence of man also depends on the presence of other living matter, the anthropocentric imitation of the processes of nature by technology must be changed to a replica that ensures the long-term existence of a universal planetary habitat for all current forms of flora and fauna. The problem of the long-term sustainability of the Planetary Oikos, not only as a habitat for humans, is, at the level of concepts, most often solved at the level of proposals for a turnaround in the way technology is used. In this context, Ellul mentions the need for a “counterbalance to technology” (Ellul 1964, 301), Lemmens and Yuk (2017, 26-41) the need to transition to “responsible and intelligent care of our Planetary Oikos”. Heidegger (1977) calls for a turn in an “onto-anthropo-technological sense”, Sloterdijk (2017, 329) a turn from “allotechnology to homeotechnology”. Stiegler (2016, 9) emphasizes the need for a “reevaluation of values” and the need for a “neganthropic pharmacological turn” aimed at caring for the Planetary Oikos. The common denominator of these “turns” is the demand for a radical change in man’s attitude towards nature - from the mood of the owner of character to the philosophy in which man will function as a guide to the planet Earth with the help of technology. However, the reality of the above turnovers is questionable. For example, Heidegger deals in detail with the possibility of realizing a turn in the onto-anthropo-technical sense in his work *Being and Time* and nevertheless does not come to a clear conclusion (van Mazijk 2013, 336-354; Gabriel 2014, 44-73).

Technology complements and completes nature only from the point of view of man’s goals, which do not have to be and, as a rule, are not even identical to nature’s natural goals. It is not about completing the “defects” of character but about switching from the direction of nature’s goals to man’s. Here, the only measure of the perfection of the final product is the human goals/purposes. A person perceives the natural environment created by nature as a “real environment”, as a

“real space”, as a “free expanse” in which he can perceive and distinguish individual objects, their shapes and/or movement. Compared to the actual space, technology has built a new digital virtual space based on information as another alternative, human habitat. In connection with the concept of “digital virtual space”, the idea of “virtual” itself needs to be updated. Chalmers proposed to move from the interpretation of virtual X “as if X but not quite X, i.e. as if real, but not real in all respects (Heim 1993, 160), to interpret virtual X as a “computer-generated version of X” (Chalmers 2017). Similarly, Deleuze proposed replacing the at-first glance clear dichotomy real - virtual with the dichotomy real (real) – not real (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). And Lévy added another dichotomy: real – not-real (Lévy 1998), where the hyphen indicates that it is not a “real fact”.

From the perspective of the “Planetary Oikos” concept, real and virtual space are two complementary subspaces that host the real and virtual components of the planetary habitat. Implementing the virtual component of the planetary habitat is often equated with the Internet or the web. The virtual piece of the planetary habitat objectively cannot fulfil all the functions of the habitat. Above all, it cannot satisfy a person’s basic needs - to obtain energy through food intake, provide him with shelter, safety, or create conditions for his reproduction. On the other hand, this component gives a person the opportunity to implement, on a global, planetary scale, activities aimed at satisfying information needs, sharing knowledge, but also satisfying the needs of communication, creating social relations and ties, etc., at a qualitatively and quantitatively higher level than is currently the case in the natural component of the planetary habitat.

Technology can also produce new things that nature does not deliver. Objectively, because technology does not pursue the goals of nature but exclusively the ideals of man. In this way, the ability of technology to produce new ones does not contradict the initial thesis about the imitation of the nature of technology. It confirms that technology does not work like a copying machine, where the original is a creation of nature. Aristotle (2010, 13-28) himself distinguished between natural

things, those “which have a hidden principle of movement (or change) and the principle of rest”, and artificial things, which have a hidden principle of “self-creation”. In this sense, nature produces natural things, and technology, on the contrary, from nature’s point of view, makes artificial, new things that nature cannot grow because they are not its goal.

Realspace was initially filled only with things created by nature. Virtual space is filled with new, artificial things technology makes from the beginning. The ever-increasing share of the virtual component of the planetary habitat due to the action of modern technology has eliminated “... the threshold separating here (analogue, carbon-based, offline) and there (digital, silicon-based, online)...” (Floridi 2019). The natural and virtual components of the planetary habitat are becoming more closely interwoven and intertwined, resulting in the start of the hybridization process. The actual physical space based on matter, in which Newton’s laws and Euclidean geometry apply, enters the process of hybridization with the virtual space based on information, which as “the new home of the mind ... is both everywhere and nowhere, but not where bodies of flesh and bones survive ...” (Barlow 2019, 5-7). The result is a hybrid – a hybrid space.

The process of hybridization of the actual space of matter and the virtual space of information can be divided into three phases in time: in the first phase, information functions as a support/extension of the case, in the second phase, information becomes part of matter, and in the third phase, information and matter become an indivisible unity – hybrid space. Metaphorically, let’s define hybrid space as the space of fluid presence in time, place, social relations, and the external environment of the Oikos. We understand the space of liquid presence as a “free (in the sense of liquid) expanse of matter and information”. As a being in the space of a liquid presence, a person constantly dynamically “flows” from his natural part to the virtual element and vice versa, without realizing in which amount of the hybrid space he is currently carrying out his activities. A state arises when $X\%$ of “I” is present in real space, and at the same time, $Y > (100 - X)\%$ of “I” is present in virtual space. Thus, the characteristic of the presence in a

hybrid place, in contrast to the state of presence in a specific place in real space, is the sense of sight “being somewhere”. The hybrid place is by its very nature an updated concept of McLuhan’s (1991) global village – one real place is (temporarily, fluidly) connected to a theoretically arbitrary number of virtual places where everyone knows each other through chats, likes, statuses, etc. The concept of “I” is a hybrid of physical and informational (data) “I”. Fluidity here manifests itself in the fact that the material “I” from the genuine part of the hybrid space spills over into the virtual part in a specific data set, like one person’s digital fingerprint. Technology in the hybrid space acts as a duplicator (real space duplicates by adding virtual space, physical identity duplicates by adding virtual identity, privacy in real space is added to informational privacy in virtual space, etc.).

4. The planetary home

Let’s preface this section with the quote, “Home is a hand to cry on” (McLuhan 1991). This brilliant metaphor from the pen of the Slovak poet Válek (1961, 48) draws attention to a person’s need not only to be but also to have a home. The hands-on which one may cry are the hands of the planet Earth as a superorganism capable of self-regulation to a certain extent (Flegr 2005, 117-118). The concept of “house” was precisely defined by Fox with the equation $\text{house} = \text{house} + \text{factor X}$ (Fox 2006, 590), where a house is an object used for housing and related social activities. We can only say with certainty about factor X that its absence (mathematically zero value of X) qualitatively degrades a house into a house, a dozen “places for survival”. In the case of the Planetary Oikos - the home of the *Homo sapiens* species – the X factor is the environment, which provides conditions for humans’ development and long-term survival as a species on planet Earth. It is an absolute natural environment and a new, technology-driven virtual one, or hybrid environment. New variants of the management of humanity’s home are the result of modern technology, which stimulates the diffusion of humanity’s home from real space to virtual space and subsequently to hybrid space.

5. Future of the Planetary Oikos

The following statements illustrate the current state of development of the relationship between man and technology:

- Salomon (1997): "Technology is ... our anthropoid/ technological lot."
- Ellul (1964, 38): "Technology has become ... in effect man's environment."
- Cera (2017, 243-281): "Technology displaces nature from the position of man's natural environment."

Today, technology modifies reality's essence by transforming it into an environment formed by various information entities, their interactions and information processes. Man ceased to be an isolated Newtonian agent and instead became a part of interconnected information organisms – he became an informant rooted in the information environment (Floridi 2019, 58-113).

Technology can, in the long term, push the original (natural) environment into the background and become the dominant habitat of the posthuman species. In this regard, Cera (2017, 243-281) introduces the so-called oikological horizon as an imaginary line separating conditions suitable for human life (*conditio humana*) from conditions unsuitable, where man is in the position of "*conditio animal*" and must adapt to the conditions of the technological habitat. Technology shifts the ecological horizon, thereby creating pressure on man to adapt to the conditions of the technological habitat. In Heidegger's age of modern technology, man is also challenged by technology in the same way as nature. It is a transition from the current species, *Homo sapiens*, through the transitional posthuman species, to a new species, which can be a new human, a technological subject, e.g. artificial intelligence, or in general, an entity characterized by reason and intelligence with the ability to influence its surroundings (Tegmark 2020). Or, on the contrary, a new species that is characterized by neither defence nor intelligence and uses other abilities unknown to humans to adapt to the external environment. In the long term, the model of the relationship "a species that seeks for itself a habitat – technology – the form of habitat that is available" would be transformed from its current form of "man –

technology – nature” into a new form of “technology – technology – technology” (Florida 2019). In the context of the further development of the shape of the Planetary Oikos, the theory of oikology by H.R. is also relevant. Sepp (2020) focused on determining a person’s place in the overall reality (Khalid and Abaas 2021, 1-14).

Today, the dominant role of technology in shaping the shape of the planetary habitat is mainly reflected by the concept of the technosphere and the concept of the emergence of a technological singularity. The technosphere represents “a system of which humans are an essential, yet subordinate part” (Haff 2014, 126-136). In the theory of technological singularity, on the other hand, as a result of the action of the “law of acceleration of responses” (Eden and Moor 2012), shortly the growth of technology possibilities will reach the point of singularity, become uncontrollable and irreversible, which will lead to unpredictable changes in human civilization.

Conclusion

The concept of “Planetary Oikos” refers to the planet Earth, its biosphere and the geological era of the Anthropocene. The Planetary Oikos represents the house, habitat and home for all living matter, especially man and his future variants, on planet Earth. The determining force of the further development of the Planetary Oikos is modern technology and management. Concerning the planetary habitat, modern technology fulfils the role of imitator of nature, as well as the role of supplementer of nature, and finally also the role of creator of new things that nature did not create. In the part of an imitator of nature, it expands the ecological niche, the habitat for man according to his requirements. In its role as a complement, technology complements the environment of matter created by nature with a new, complementary environment of information, thus enabling the expansion of the Planetary Oikos into virtual space. Finally, technology contributes to the formation of a new type of space - hybrid space - and subsequently also to the management of a new kind of Planetary Oikos – hybrid Oikos. In the context of the “ Planetary Oikos” concept, hybridization is decisive.

From the point of view of evaluating the results of the impact of technology on the current form of the Planetary Oikos, modern technology is “to a lesser extent improving, or expanding technology”. It is, above all, a transforming technology (Floridi 2019). The form of the Planetary Oikos will thus, in the long term, be mainly influenced by the state of technology. One of the possible scenarios for the development of its future form is the emergence of a Planetary Oikos in the environment of technology. This would fulfil the vision of Cera (2017, 243–281). “Technology (sets in) as the Oikos (habitat) of contemporary humanity.” Thus, the brilliance and wealth of our civilization cannot hide its entry into the stage of (de)evolution, where Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” concerning the Planetary Oikos ceases to be a metaphor. It is necessary to move away from the consumerist pragmatic attitude towards the Planetary Oikos towards the search for an answer to the question: “Where we come from, who we are and where we are going.”, or where we would like to go.

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A Gadamerian Approach to Epistemic Injustice: Bearing Witness to the Vaccine Injured

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Abstract

In a recent article, “The Lacuna of Hermeneutics: Notes on the Freedom of Thought,” Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback raises an important question regarding the limitations of philosophical hermeneutics to be critical and attentive to the reality of current, concrete socio-political issues. In response, I claim that Gadamerian hermeneutics is well positioned to address current and controversial instances of epistemic injustice. In this article, I focus on the contemporary and controversial example of testimony of those that have been injured by the COVID-19 vaccines. In turning to selections from Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, as well his lectures and essays on health and medicine, I argue that Gadamer’s emphasis on hermeneutic openness and readiness, as well as an attunement to the linguistic and embodied experience of pain, allow us to consider a responsible approach to testimonies of the vaccine injured. Instead of providing a set of criteria or a particular method for distinguishing true from false testimony, Gadamerian hermeneutics calls for an examination and transformation of one’s prejudices, especially prejudices which may impede one’s ability to interpret and understand the subject matter in the first place.

Keywords: Gadamer, hermeneutics, testimony, pain, COVID-19, vaccine

Introduction

In a recent article, “The Lacuna of Hermeneutics: Notes on the Freedom of Thought,” Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback raises an important question regarding the limitations of philosophical hermeneutics to be critical and attentive to the reality of the present moment. With a prominent focus on the past and the authority of tradition in the hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, the concern is that hermeneutics tends to fall into a reactionary conservatism

that is unable to make a “break with tradition” and “interrupt a heritage and a legacy” when such an intervention is needed (Schuback 2021, 166).¹ This is indeed a crucial and unavoidable question for contemporary hermeneutics scholars who wish to assert that hermeneutics can meaningfully address current concrete socio-political issues.² If contemporary hermeneutic scholarship falls prey to what Gadamer calls the “tyranny of hidden prejudices” (Gadamer 2013, 282), then instead of illuminating important socio-political issues, it may in fact escape, avoid, or distort these issues. If hermeneutics is truly unable to be critical of the authority of tradition, then what are the possibilities of hermeneutics to disclose the real, factual, and even painful conditions of our present moment?

In this essay, I would like to respond to this question by considering the way in which Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is, in fact, able to attend to the present moment by addressing a current and controversial instance of epistemic injustice. For Miranda Fricker, two forms of epistemic injustice include testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice takes place “when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word,” and hermeneutical injustice occurs “when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (Fricker 2007, 1). Testimonial injustice, then, concerns the prejudices of an individual when listening to someone else’s testimony, while hermeneutical injustice concerns prejudices at the structural and conceptual level of a community that make it difficult for the testimony and experiences of marginalized individuals to appear or to be intelligible at all (Fricker 2007, 6-7).

The particular example of epistemic injustice that I want to focus on in this essay concerns the testimony and experience of those who have suffered, and continue to suffer, serious injuries from the COVID-19 vaccines.³ COVID-19 vaccination is one of the most polarizing issues in the world today. A large part of this polarization is associated with the pervasive categorization of individuals as either ‘vaccinated’ or ‘unvaccinated,’ with a wide range of medical, social, political,

economic, and moral claims that are implied in each of these terms.⁴ While there are many nuanced positions and categorizations that become lost in this distinction between vaccinated and unvaccinated,⁵ there is one group in particular that continues to experience epistemic injustice, namely, those who have been injured by the COVID-19 vaccines. Furthermore, when it comes to COVID-19 vaccination, much of the literature in the humanities and social sciences focuses on moral, political, and sociological issues surrounding vaccine mandates, vaccine hesitancy, or outright vaccine refusal (often referred to as ‘anti-vax’ or ‘anti-vaxxers’).⁶ What makes COVID-19 vaccine injury a particularly interesting and controversial case study is that these individuals did not refuse the COVID-19 vaccine and many of them were enthusiastic about receiving the injections. In this way, while many of these individuals are now critical of the COVID-19 vaccine, they do not fall so neatly into the categories of ‘vaccine hesitant’ or ‘anti-vax’ as traditionally conceived.

These individuals experience testimonial injustice insofar as their voices are often unacknowledged or dismissed by medical professionals and the media. When their voices do make it into the public space, their credibility is challenged as they are often associated with ‘anti-vaxxers,’ ‘conspiracy theorists,’ and spreaders of ‘misinformation’ and ‘disinformation.’ They suffer hermeneutical injustice in a particularly cruel form, for instance, when medical professionals seem unable to consider the possibility that an individual’s pain and suffering could have been caused by the vaccine. In such cases, medical professionals appear to be constrained by a structural and conceptual prejudice, in which it is inconceivable that the COVID-19 vaccines could be the cause of serious harm to their patients. Such hermeneutical injustice has led to some physicians diagnosing severe neurological or cardiovascular symptoms as the result of stress or anxiety, ultimately leading to the mistreatment or lack of treatment for the patient’s illness.⁷

In this paper, I claim that Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is more than equipped to address these contemporary forms of epistemic injustice, and in this way, can

further respond to the concerns raised by Schuback about the critical capacities of hermeneutics. In order to do this, I turn to Gadamer's work on hermeneutic experience and his account of pain, treatment, and dialogue. First, I turn to some of Gadamer's more famous passages in *Truth and Method* that concern the importance of allowing one's prejudices to come into play in interpretive experience, as well as the notion that hermeneutic experience is often a painful encounter with an experience that is new and challenging. Second, I turn briefly to Gadamer's essays and lectures on health and medicine in order to emphasize the important role of pain in his hermeneutic project. For Gadamer, the experience of pain presents challenges in being able to bring this experience into language for oneself and for others. Third, I turn to several examples of testimony from the vaccine injured in order to provide contour to the particular injustice that they suffer. In this section, I also offer some hermeneutic reflections on why it is often difficult for these testimonies to be heard or seen at all in the public space. In the last section, I show the importance and necessity of hermeneutic openness and readiness, as well as an attunement to the linguistic and embodied experience of pain, in order to bear witness to these testimonies of our present moment.⁸

Lastly, my paper attempts to open up Gadamerian hermeneutic scholarship to consider new forms of 'text' for hermeneutic interpretation. Philosophical hermeneutics often focuses on literary texts from the past (such as philosophy, literature, poetry, or works of art) as testimonies which we must interpret and understand. The testimony I want to consider in this paper diverges from these usual forms of testimony and focuses on contemporary 'texts' such as social media posts, podcasts, and long format interviews. In order for hermeneutics to attend to the epistemic injustice of the vaccine injured and otherwise attend to current social/political issues, scholars must engage these more contemporary and perhaps unfamiliar texts that are not afforded the interpretive advantages of a scholarly tradition or a history of established research.

1. Gadamer on Prejudice and the Person of Experience

Gadamer's emphasis on the role of prejudice and finitude in hermeneutic experience is crucial for understanding why Gadamerian hermeneutics is needed in order to hear a difficult and challenging testimony of the present moment. One of Gadamer's major tasks in *Truth and Method* is to rehabilitate the authority of tradition and to bring our historically effected consciousness into view. His comments on the authority of tradition rest upon the role of prejudice (*Vorurteil*) in the event of understanding. In drawing on Heidegger's fore-structure of understanding, Gadamer reminds us that understanding is not a matter of applying a theory or method to an object of research, but rather understanding is an ontological event that occurs in the constant revealing and concealing movement of one's own prejudgments and expectations of meaning. Understanding, then, involves the exposure of our prejudices and the examination of their legitimacy for allowing an appropriate meaning to come into view. For this reason, hermeneutic interpretation requires an openness to what the text or other person has to say that may "pull us up short" (*Anstoß*) or "is not compatible with what we had expected" (Gadamer 2013, 280-281). Such a disposition towards the text or the other is "neither 'neutrality' with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (Gadamer 2013, 282). Hermeneutical understanding concerns the meaning that emerges from out of this constant dialectical play between the alterity of the text and our own prejudices. On the one hand, we ought to avoid the "tyranny of hidden prejudices" that make us unable to hear the alterity of the text (Gadamer 2013, 282). On the other hand, we ought to avoid the very "prejudice against prejudice" that marks the Enlightenment, namely, the drive to remove, destroy, or overcome prejudice itself as something that only motivates our misunderstanding of the text (Gadamer 2013, 283). For

Gadamer, one ought not to attempt to ‘get rid’ of one’s prejudices, but rather, one ought to allow one’s prejudices to come to the fore, to be challenged, and to be transformed by what is alien, strange, or foreign to what we have already come to know.

Gadamer advocates for a hermeneutical commitment to the other and to those difficult and often painful experiences that allow us to see the particular subject matter of understanding in a new and transformative way. In fact, for Gadamer, hermeneutic experience is grounded in the negation of new, challenging, and painful experiences. He first tells us that experience can either “conform to our expectation and confirm it” or it can be a genuinely new experience that challenges this expectation (Gadamer 2013, 361). This new, challenging experience is negative insofar as it opposes or thwarts what we already know to be true, yet this negativity also ushers forth a positivity: “If a new experience of an object occurs to us, this means that hitherto we have not seen the thing correctly and now know it better. Thus the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply that we see through a deception and hence make a correction, but we acquire a comprehensive knowledge” (Gadamer 2013, 361-362). Experience is then a matter of expanding one’s comprehensive knowledge of the hermeneutic situation one finds oneself in, and this requires a constant imposition of what is foreign, strange, or unexpected into our familiar horizon of understanding. To be sure, this kind of experience is not a matter of simply accruing new information about a particular subject matter, but about developing a proper disposition for hermeneutic consciousness, namely, a disposition that is open to new experiences:

The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only *through* experiences but is also open *to* new experiences. The consummation of his experience, the perfection that we call ‘being experienced,’ does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not

in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself. (Gadamer 2013, 364)

A readiness or openness to new experience is a disposition that is willing and able to learn from this experience, such that what may challenge our own prejudices is not seen as merely an attack, but as the possibility of understanding a more comprehensive context of meaning that demands a transformation of our own prejudices.

However, such a readiness and openness to new experience is no easy task and often requires the will to reckon with our own finitude. As Gadamer notes, a common characteristic of the 'newness' of experience is that it is an experience of suffering. Insofar as new experience challenges or "thwarts" our expectation, new experience often involves experiences that are "painful and disagreeable" (Gadamer 2013, 364). Gadamer here refers to Aeschylus' formula of "learning through suffering" as that which characterizes historical, hermeneutical experience (Gadamer 2013, 365). Much in the same way that the person of experience is not someone who merely acquires a set of new experiences, what one learns through suffering is not some sort of particular knowledge about the kind of suffering one is undergoing. What one learns through suffering is the truth of human finitude:

What a man has to learn through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but insight into the limitations of humanity, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from the divine... Thus experience is experience of human finitude. The truly experienced person is one who has taken this to heart, who knows that he is master neither of time nor the future. The experienced man knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain. . . Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason. The idea that everything can be reversed, that there is always time for everything and that everything somehow returns, proves to be an illusion. (Gadamer 2013, 365)

Pain, disappointment, the thwarting of expectations, and suffering, are all different ways of characterizing the profound encounter with human finitude at the heart of hermeneutic experience. It is an encounter with our limitations as a mortal being, as a being that dies and for whom all

knowledge about the past is incomplete and whose plans for the future are inevitably cut short. This encounter with our own finitude is that which allows us to attune ourselves to the voice and claims of the other, and to find solidarity in the finitude that we share as human beings.

Hermeneutic experience then requires that we approach the claims of the other with all dignity and respect and to treat the other as a ‘Thou’ to the fullest degree. For Gadamer, hermeneutic experience is marked by an I-Thou relation, the highest actualization of which is to “experience the Thou truly as a Thou – i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us” (Gadamer 2013, 369). This requires a committed openness for both the speaker and listener in the conversation: “Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another” (Gadamer 2013, 369). Furthermore, this openness requires the humility of having one’s prejudices open for transformation and for one’s expectations to be challenged: “Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so” (Gadamer 2013, 369). A true hermeneutic consciousness maintains a sensibility of readiness towards the claims of the other, a readiness that is at the same time open to new and possibly painful experiences that challenge our familiar and comfortable horizon of understanding.

2. Gadamer on Pain

Aside from Gadamer’s remarks on the painful, disagreeable, and suffering qualities that are a central part of hermeneutic experience, he also has several focused reflections on concrete experience with pain.⁹ In several of his essays and lectures on health and medicine, he discusses the overwhelming character of pain and the great difficulties of bringing this experience of pain into language for oneself and others. In his essay, “Bodily Experience and the Limits of Objectification,” he discusses the great alienation and “inwardization” that arises in the experience of extreme or acute pain: “So powerfully does pain cause us to withdraw from all external experience of the

world and turn us back upon ourselves. . . Every culture knows something of the profound inwardization involved in suffering and the endurance of pain” (Gadamer 1996, 75). In his essay, “Treatment and Dialogue,” Gadamer also refers to the difficulty of interpreting our own painful experiences: “But he [Prince Auersperg] also shows us that peculiar self-concealment which belongs to pain, so that it often proves difficult to say exactly where it hurts” (Gadamer 1996, 131). This inwardization and self-concealment of pain requires the physician or medical professional to do much more than collect data and apply instrumental knowledge and modern medical techniques upon the patient. Gadamer raises this concern in his essay, “Philosophy and Practical Medicine,” in which he writes: “Instead of learning to look for illness in the eyes of the patient or to listen for it in the patient’s voice, we try to read it off the data provided by technologically sophisticated measuring instruments” (Gadamer 1996, 98). For Gadamer, treatment, involves speech and dialogue, and an attentiveness to the voice and embodied experience of the patient.

In order to properly attend to the pain of the patient, Gadamer reminds us of the intimacy and proximity involved in the German word for treatment, *Behandlung*. In this word, Gadamer hears the special tactile sense that a physician must develop in order to ‘handle’ someone with care and responsibility: “Within it [*Behandlung*] one hears literally the word ‘hand,’ the skilled and practiced hand that can recognize problems simply through feeling and touching the affected parts of the patient’s body” (Gadamer 1996, 99). To treat or handle a patient in this way is to attune oneself to not just to the verbal or written account of the patient’s pain, but also to the patient’s embodied testimony of pain: “It [*behandeln*] means, with the hand (*palpus*), carefully and responsively feeling the patient’s body so as to detect strains and tensions which can perhaps help to confirm or correct the patient’s own subjective localization, that is, the patient’s experience of pain. The function of pain in the living body is to register through subjective sensation a disturbance in that harmonious balance of bodily processes which constitutes health” (Gadamer 1996, 108). This careful attentiveness to the patient is likewise a

careful attention to language and dialogue that takes place between the physician and the patient. The dialogue that ought to take place between the physician and patient is one of question and answer, such that all partners in the conversation “find themselves caught up and involved” (Gadamer 1996, 128).¹⁰ Dialogue, for Gadamer, implies the active participation of both the physician and the patient in the process of treatment, such that the dialogue is not simply the physician attempting to mine helpful information from the patient, but that the dialogue itself is “seen as part of the treatment itself and as something which remains important throughout the entire process of making a recovery.” (Gadamer 1996, 128)

As we will see in the remainder of this essay, properly attending to the experience of the pain of others requires a particularly sensitive hermeneutical attunement to the verbal and embodied testimony of this pain. While pain can be explicit and visceral in its severity, it can likewise conceal itself and resist its actualization in language. In response to the pain and suffering of others, Gadamer calls us to not only cultivate an openness for new experience, but to attune ourselves as best we can to a verbal and embodied testimony that resists its own articulation.

3. The Testimony of the Vaccine Injured

In focusing on these moments in Gadamer’s works which emphasize an openness to hearing the call of the pain and suffering of others, I want to show why his hermeneutical project is vital for addressing the epistemic injustice concerning COVID-19 vaccine injuries. In current public discourse, it is a challenging task to enter into a genuine, open conversation about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines and whether, and to what degree, individuals are being seriously harmed by them. However, if we take Gadamer’s hermeneutic project seriously, and I think we should, then affirming a hermeneutic consciousness is precisely what is called for in order to bring this subject matter to light and to bear witness to the pain and suffering of those that have been injured by the COVID-19 vaccines.

Before engaging various testimonies of the vaccine injured, it is important to offer an account of what I mean by vaccine ‘injury’ in this discussion. First, the word ‘injury’ in this paper will be coterminous with what public health authorities call an adverse effect or “adverse event” (CDC 2023, May 31). In this essay, a vaccine injury does not refer to the many common side effects noted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), such as soreness in the arm, fatigue, tiredness, headaches, or fever (CDC 2023, May 5). A vaccine injury is serious and often leads to hospitalization, long-term or life-long debilitation, and also includes death. These injuries include, but are not limited to, anaphylaxis, thrombosis, thrombocytopenia, Guillain-Barré syndrome, Bell’s palsy, myocarditis, pericarditis, stroke, and heart attack (CDC 2023, May 31). While the frequency of COVID-19 vaccine injury is a contentious and debatable topic, there is ample and unequivocal evidence that such injuries have occurred and continue to occur for many individuals. For instance, there are currently more than 3,000 peer-reviewed studies in scientific and medical journals that document case studies and mechanisms of action for COVID-19 vaccine injury (REACT19 2022).¹¹ Most recently, there is even a growing interest in what researchers are calling “Long Vax,” which mimics symptoms of Long Covid (Vogel & Couzin-Frankel 2023).

However, the most pervasive and controversial evidence for vaccine injury concerns the many forms of vaccine injury testimony that I want to explore in this second half of this essay. In this essay, I consider a testimony to be any kind of claim, statement, or appeal that makes a two-fold demand on the listener or the one who bears witness to the testimony: 1) to be open and ready for the possibility that the testimony is true; 2) to act responsibly and with care in the face of what is revealed in such testimony. With this in mind, I want to focus on just a few forms of testimony of the vaccine injured. At the most visceral and personal level, this testimony takes the form of individual written and verbal accounts. Perhaps the most publicized instance of this first form of testimony comes from a hearing held by U.S. Senator Ron Johnson on November 2nd, 2021. During this hearing, several vaccine injured individuals,

such as Kellai Rodriguez, Kyle Werner, Doug Cameron, Brianne Dressen, and Maddie de Garay, gave voice to their injuries to the public (Johnson 2021). This form of testimony also includes the vaccine injured discussing their injuries on social media and podcasts (Cherry 2022; Tan 2022). Testimony of the vaccine injured can also be associated with the testimony of experts that give an account of these injuries on behalf of those injured and are unable to be heard. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, several nurses at hospitals in Ventura County, CA (Kilpatrick 2021 October 21 and December 14), and physician whistleblower accounts of vaccine injury submitted to Health & Human Services (HHS), the CDC, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (Siri & Brehm 2021).

However, despite the evidence and publicity of such testimony, the vaccine injured often encounter disbelief and dismissal from medical professionals regarding their claim that the vaccine is the cause of their injuries.¹² In response to this, several vaccine injured individuals created REACT19, a “science-based non-profit” organization that offers “financial, physical, and emotional support for those suffering from longterm Covid-19 vaccine adverse events” (REACT19 2021). One of the many resources provided by the organization is the *Dearly Discarded* podcast, in which host Jared St. Clair interviews individuals who have been injured by the COVID-19 vaccine. In one example, St. Clair interviews 22-year old André Cherry, a vaccine injured person who received his second Moderna vaccine injection on June 23rd, 2021. André began experiencing tremors in his arms and legs just hours and days after receiving the injection. He then began to experience a wide array of debilitating neurological symptoms in the months that followed, as well as a severe disruption in his young life: “It’s been a very difficult and frustrating thing to be experiencing slowly losing control of your body” (Cherry 2022). André and his family did not initially consider the vaccine to be the cause of these symptoms, and their first trip to the emergency room ended with a diagnosis of dehydration. Once they began to suspect that the vaccine triggered André’s symptoms, they informed their medical professionals about

their concerns. This message, according to André's mother, "was not received" (Cherry 2022).

André and his family decided to contact Moderna about his symptoms being a possible reaction to the vaccine shot. However, in order to do a proper follow up with Moderna, the vaccine company required André to have a doctor fill out a form and verify that his symptoms were a reaction to the vaccine. As of the time of the interview (April 8 2022), André and his family have still not been able to find a physician "who's willing to say that this could potentially be related to the vaccine" (Cherry 2022). André's family describes medical professionals consistently diagnosing his symptoms as related to stress or anxiety, with his mother explaining that they have had to "fight for every test that we've gotten for him" (Cherry 2022). On a visit to a neurosurgeon, André and his family bring video of André's symptoms to show the doctor. André's brother describes the interaction with the neurosurgeon in the following way: "And his [the neurosurgeon] response to us trying to show him those videos is that he doesn't want to argue. . . and no one was arguing . . . we want you to look at this stuff so you can see the severity of his circumstance." (Cherry 2022)

Another example is that of Kamila Tan. Kamila was a healthy athlete who played beach volleyball at UCLA and was completing a master's degree in public health at the time she received two injections of the Pfizer vaccine in January of 2021. After a few months she began to experience several debilitating symptoms, but had concerns about talking about them:

I was so hesitant to share my story at first because my symptoms were not immediate... I don't like getting into the details of how long it took me to experience X,Y,Z symptom, or how long it took for them to build up over time, because it gives people a reason not to believe me. And it was really frustrating to walk into doctor's offices and say "no I didn't experience these symptoms right away, but this is the one thing that I've done differently with my health." (Tan 2022)

After explaining to medical professionals all of her new symptoms, such as neuropathy, body aches, migraines, tremors, and tinnitus, Kamila tells us that "they were all just chalked up to stress." (Tan 2022) Like André and many others, Kamila encountered the same frustrations about being heard and believed by medical professionals: "You expect to go to the

doctor and get answers. I kept going to the doctor and being more confused and being invalidated.”¹³ (Tan 2022)

While these are only two brief examples, they provide a glimpse into the epistemic injustice that the community of vaccine injured individuals experience in trying to speak about their pain and suffering. First, each individual encounters an initial pain and confusion regarding their symptoms. Both of these individuals are young and (were) healthy, and then their health took a dramatic and unexplainable turn. Both, to different degrees, have had to endure the disbelief, denial, and misdiagnosis of various medical professionals. While these accounts are only anecdotal, they point to a common experience of many vaccine injured, namely, that they are often told that their symptoms are simply due to stress or anxiety. This, of course, is not meant to downplay the possibility that stress and anxiety could be involved in their symptoms. It could also very well be the case that many individuals actually do experience stress and anxiety instead of a vaccine injury. However, in cases such as André and Kamila, symptoms were severe and persisted, and a misdiagnosis of stress or anxiety only served to ignore or dismiss their pain and suffering.¹⁴

Given that this form of epistemic injustice can lead to very real and significant harm to individuals already experiencing great pain and suffering, a hermeneutic approach to this testimony should engage some difficult questions about why this injustice takes place. Why, for instance, is it so difficult for these testimonies to be heard and believed? Why do the vaccine injured often encounter an initial disbelief and dismissal by their healthcare professionals, especially when we consider the incredible sacrifices and efforts made by medical professionals in service to their patients over the course of the pandemic? One possible explanation for this kind of injustice is a nationwide effort to address vaccine hesitancy by eliminating forms of misinformation and disinformation surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine. In July of 2021, U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, issued a public statement entitled, “Confronting Health Misinformation,” in which he discusses the dangers of misinformation: “Misinformation has caused confusion and led people to decline COVID-19 vaccines, reject public health

measures such as masking and physical distancing, and use unproven treatments. For example, a recent study showed that even brief exposure to COVID-19 vaccine misinformation made people less likely to want a COVID-19 vaccine” (Murthy 2021, 4). Given this, it is not hard to understand why there would be an immediate stigma attached to those that claim they have been injured by the COVID-19 vaccine, and why not just medical professionals, but even friends, family, and the general public would be initially dismissive of these claims. In this way, the worry about vaccine hesitancy could lead to a societal prejudice (in the Gadamerian sense) of disbelief or suspicion about the claims of vaccine injury. From the standpoint of medical professionals, vaccines have become an incredibly important and powerful tool for addressing the crisis of COVID-19. Because of this, it is only understandable that individuals claiming that they were injured by the COVID-19 vaccine are met with resistance, especially from medical professionals. Such claims may run counter to what healthcare professionals know and understand about the disease and the vaccine, and it could be a terrifying thought to consider the possibility that in some (perhaps rare) cases the cure for COVID-19 actually caused a patient serious pain and suffering.¹⁵ From a Gadamerian point of view, this would require allowing a deep and volatile prejudice about the COVID-19 vaccines to be put into play and challenged, which could be a profoundly disturbing and disagreeable experience for any medical professional trying to do right by their patients and the public at large.

Yet the epistemic injustice suffered by the vaccine injured also takes place outside of the doctor’s office or emergency room. For the general public, access to these testimonies is made difficult by mis- and disinformation policies on social media and in the press. For instance, AP, AFP, BBC, CBC/Radio-Canada, European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Facebook, Financial Times, First Draft, Google/YouTube, The Hindu, Microsoft, Reuters, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Twitter, and The Washington Post are all part of the “Trusted News Initiative,” which aims to “work together to expand our framework and ensure legitimate concerns about

future vaccinations are heard, whilst harmful disinformation myths are stopped in their tracks” (BBC 2020). Undoubtedly, there is false information (intentional or otherwise) on social media and in the press about the COVID-19 vaccine. However, it is not hard to see how honest testimony about one’s vaccine injury can become associated with social media accounts and activist groups that make extreme claims and violate the misinformation policy. For instance, Madelyn Webb and Kayla Gogarty of *Media Matters for America* report on the deletion of a Facebook group with the name “COVID 19 VACCINE VICTIMS AND FAMILIES” in April of 2021, a group that was “dedicated to gathering stories of people allegedly injured by the COVID-19 vaccine. According to the company, the group was removed because it had violated Facebook’s harmful misinformation policies” (Webb & Gogarty 2021). While Facebook may rightfully argue that the group was engaging in harmful behavior and therefore was violating the policy, it also seems unreasonable to assume that every single story in the group was false or fabricated in some way. How many of those stories were genuine and how many individuals actually found helpful information and much needed support in that Facebook group? Furthermore, the recent reporting of the so called “Twitter Files” suggests that social media companies were actually encouraged by third party organizations (such as Stanford University’s Virality Project) to remove “true content which might promote vaccine hesitancy,” which includes “stories of true vaccine side effects” (Taibbi 2023).¹⁶ While mis- and disinformation policies may be designed and implemented in a way that is relatively effective and with the best intentions, they may also unwittingly remove from their platform honest and genuine voices attempting to speak about their pain and suffering.¹⁷ Here, I think, it is important to return to Gadamer’s claim about a particular openness and readiness for hearing a difficult truth. Instead of painting a broad brush over testimony of vaccine injury as simply dis/misinformation, it is paramount to hold open the possibility that not all claims about vaccine injury are simply false or not worthy of consideration, but that such claims might be pulling us up short and challenging us to

approach the situation with a more complex horizon of understanding.

4. Conclusion: A Hermeneutic Approach to the Testimonies of the Vaccine Injured

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics provides us with several important insights in order that we may responsibly bear witness to testimonies of the vaccine injured. Gadamer's emphasis on being open and ready for new experience is crucial for this task. If we approach the claims of the vaccine injured without willing to have our own prejudices and expectations challenged and possibly transformed, then we are not acting responsibly in the face of such testimony. For instance, given the messaging campaign to the public regarding the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines, listening to the testimony of the vaccine injured means that we must bring our own prejudices about the safety of the vaccines into play. We must hold open the possibility that those that appear as dissenting voices are perhaps not lying nor engaged in self-deception about their own symptoms or the symptoms of others, and we must not outright dismiss these individuals as simply caught up in a particular political or cultural ideology. This means we should avoid philosophical approaches like the one put forward by Steven Nadler and Lawrence Shapiro in their opinion piece in *The Times of Israel*, which refers to individuals in opposition to the COVID-19 vaccines as "stupid" and suffering from an "ailment" they call "epistemic stubbornness":

The epistemically stubborn person refuses to tailor his or her beliefs to the available evidence. They continue to believe, for instance, that the COVID-19 vaccine is dangerous despite the wealth of evidence to the contrary. Typically, the fault is not ignorance of the facts - one would have to be living in a deep hole not to have been exposed to widespread reports of the corona virus's danger and the vaccine's efficacy and safety - but a stubborn refusal to see the facts as repudiating what one *wants* to believe. (Nadler & Shapiro 2021)

Here, it is hard to imagine that the authors of this article would be able to bear witness to the more visceral and individual testimonies of the pain and suffering of the vaccine injured. To do so would require an openness and readiness for

the possibility that the individual is not merely epistemically stubborn, that the COVID-19 vaccine could be dangerous, and that the individual has something meaningful to say. In short, it means to treat such an individual as a Thou and to not overlook the claim that is made on us to understand.

Gadamer's emphasis on speech, dialogue, and embodiment in relation to the experience and inwardization of pain is a call to be sensitive to language that continues to isolate and alienate the vaccine injured. In hastily labeling the claims of those that have been injured by the vaccines as 'misinformation' or 'disinformation,' and by referring to such individuals as 'anti-vaxxers,' we run the risk of dismissing their testimony as wrong, inaccurate, and unworthy of being heard. This, of course, does not mean that misinformation or disinformation surrounding vaccine injury does not exist. However, in labeling as misinformation the testimony of those genuinely suffering from vaccine injury we only further invalidate their experience. Furthermore, we ought to be wary of the deceptively banal language of 'adverse events' in bearing witness to the real pain and suffering of others. As an example, I refer back to vaccine injury testimony from the Senator Johnson hearing. This is how Sean Barcavage, himself a nurse practitioner, describes his experience with the 'adverse events' of the vaccine:

Things continued to progress. I developed POTS, POTS syndrome. Never even heard of it before I was a nurse, where you can't stand for more than five minutes without your heart rate zooming, getting faint and nauseous. Severe intractable insomnia. I never had a problem sleeping before. Suddenly I'm taking five meds to try to get to sleep. Muscle twitches, tremors, adrenal dumps. Adrenal dumps that would burn my muscles and my stomach. . . By August I literally exploded in generalized body neuropathies. Imagine, waking up in the middle of the night, stinging in my hands and feet, burning in the soles of my feet, prickling all over like I fell in a bush of nettles. . . This experience has shattered my life... The 24/7 tinnitus has robbed me of every moment of silence and peace. The impact on my medical career which I love and worked so hard for is immeasurable. (Barcavage 2021)

To take a hermeneutic approach to the testimony of the vaccine injured is to hear the call of pain and suffering in their testimonies and restore the nauseating, stinging, burning,

tremoring, and life shattering language that is so easily covered over by the language of ‘adverse events’ and ‘adverse effects.’ To attend to this testimony is to avoid immediately assuming that the painful experience of an individual is a matter of stress or anxiety. Instead, attending to this testimony means hearing and listening to the embodied claim of the individual and to recognize the great difficulty of bringing this experience of pain into language for others. If, for Gadamer, the experience of pain already promotes a self-concealment or inwardization, then it requires all the more care, patience, and attention in order for this experience to come forth into language and into dialogue with others.

While I claim that Gadamerian hermeneutics is already well prepared to approach these difficult testimonies of the present moment, Schuback’s concern with the possibility that “hermeneutics misses rather than embraces the challenges of our today” (Schuback 2021, 167), nevertheless pushes contemporary hermeneutic scholarship to reconsider the kinds of texts and testimonies that we ought to turn to in order that we do not miss concrete concerns of the present moment. The testimony from the vaccine injured brings this issue to light. Instead of always turning to philosophy, literature, poetry, art, or music, contemporary hermeneutics needs to incorporate more up to date ‘texts’ into the interpretive space, such as social media and blog posts, podcasts, and long format interviews. While there are many concerns about the credibility and veracity of these texts, a hermeneutical approach must nevertheless hold open the ‘possibility’ that such testimony is meaningful and worthy of interpretive engagement. Interpreting newer forms of texts and testimony also means hermeneutic scholarship needs to become more interdisciplinary and engage scholarship in the sciences. With the case of COVID-19 vaccines, this means that we are not only involved in a critical dialogue with our public health authorities and institutions, but also with those qualified researchers and practitioners in the medical field that not only support the COVID-19 vaccines, but also those that have reasonable concerns about them as well. In this way, we may be able to bear witness to the voices of pain and suffering that may

challenge our prejudices about public health measures and medical treatment.

Lastly, bearing witness to the testimonies of the vaccine injured is a call to avoid various prejudicial pitfalls that restrict us from seeing and accepting new experience. It is a call to cultivate and maintain a hermeneutic openness and readiness to that which may challenge and overwhelm our expectations of what is true and real. This, of course, is a much different approach to testimony than standard approaches in analytic epistemology. For Gadamer, the point of hermeneutic experience and interpretation is not to develop a method or series of criteria for adjudicating between true and false testimony. Instead, a hermeneutic approach to testimony is a matter of allowing the other to speak, allowing our own prejudices about the subject matter to be tested, and ultimately allowing the subject matter itself to be illuminated and understood in a newer and more complete way. In this way, a Gadamerian approach to the testimony of the vaccine injured is less about determining the veracity of an individual's statement, but about examining and transforming prejudices that may be inappropriate to the particular situation, that is, prejudices that may impede our ability to interpret and understand the subject matter at hand. Without such a hermeneutic approach, then we run the risk of not attending to the real plight of those that are already easily dismissed and cast aside to the fringes of public discourse. Worse, we risk committing and perpetuating epistemic injustice by ignoring the testimony of the pain and suffering of others. As Gadamer tells us, a hermeneutic disposition of openness and readiness for new experience is to undergo often painful and disappointing experiences. It is typically not an enjoyable experience to have our prejudices challenged and put into question, especially concerning a matter as serious as COVID-19 vaccination. However, regardless of one's position and judgment about the COVID-19 vaccines, it is now more important than ever to be open to new experience, to hold open the possibility that the other is right and that we are wrong, and to treat all of those suffering with the dignity and respect

they deserve by approaching their testimony with patience and humility.

NOTES

¹ It should be noted that Schuback is hopeful and affirmative about the possibilities for hermeneutics to address questions of our 'today.' However, instead of focusing on a particular contemporary issue, Schuback turns to the poetry of Paul Celan and develops an account of hermeneutics that engages a "gerundive mode of existing." (Schuback 2021, 175)

² See Alcoff 2006; Warnke 2015; and Barthold 2016 for examples of hermeneutics scholars focusing on contemporary socio-political issues, such as race and gender.

³ I am also focusing on COVID-19 vaccination in order to add to hermeneutics scholarship that attends to issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. See Nielsen and Liakos 2020; Kearney 2021; Aho 2020 and 2022. This paper likewise contributes to emerging scholarship that brings Gadamerian hermeneutics into conversation with Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic injustice. See Burke 2022 and Nielsen & Utsler 2023.

⁴ For instance, refusing the Covid-19 vaccine is often associated with a politically conservative background or being from a 'red state' area. See Leonhard 2021; Krugman 2021; and Brown 2021. Refusing the COVID-19 vaccine is also typically seen as an immoral or irresponsible decision that puts oneself and others at an unnecessary risk. See Matose 2023, and Nadler and Shapiro 2021.

⁵ Some of these positions include: people that are only partially vaccinated with one shot; people who have received the initial two shot regimen but no booster; or people who have received the initial two shot regimen plus one or more booster shots. Furthermore, what it means to be 'vaccinated' or 'fully vaccinated' for COVID-19 continues to shift over time depending on age and development of newer updated vaccines (CDC 2023, June 7).

⁶ See, for instance, Matose 2023, Huang 2022, Giubilini and Savulescu 2022, and Kattumana 2022.

⁷ See Dressen 2022. Dressen discusses other harms that come from this particular mode of hermeneutical injustice. This includes several instances of suicide due to the physical pain of vaccine injuries and the psychological trauma of not being believed by friends, family, and most importantly, the medical community.

⁸ I use the term "bearing witness" throughout this paper in order to indicate the disposition of openness, readiness, and attunement in Gadamer's hermeneutics as the responsible or ethical response to the testimony of the vaccine injured.

⁹ Gadamer maintained an avid interest in issues surrounding health, medicine, illness, and pain throughout his life. In fact, one of Gadamer's final professional appearances was as a lecturer on the topic of pain at a medical conference in Heidelberg in 2000 (Gadamer 2020).

¹⁰ In his 2000 lecture on pain, Gadamer considers the first cries of a newborn at birth as the initiation of a conversation with the world: “Here in the birth cry, I already find an early indication of a conversation, a conversation which one has not yet seen, either with one’s own mother or the doctor” (Gadamer 2020). Even at birth, the appeal to dialogue is a fundamental aspect of human experience.

¹¹ The non-profit organization for the vaccine injured, REACT19, has compiled these studies in an easily accessible format on their website. See REACT19 2022.

¹² Dismissal or denial of COVID-19 vaccine injury by healthcare professionals is a common experience detailed by many of those who testified at the Senator Johnson hearing. See Broder 2022 for more discussion about these experiences.

¹³ See the REACT19 website for more examples of written, audio, and video testimony from vaccine injured who have experienced disbelief and dismissal from medical professionals about the cause of their injuries.

¹⁴ Skepticism of vaccine related symptoms points to another common issue for the vaccine injured, namely, a lack of resources for treating their symptoms. One notable example in this regard is the great difficulty in receiving any kind of financial compensation through federal programs, such as the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) or the Countermeasures Injury Compensation Program (CICP). For more, see (Demasi 2022). Furthermore, when the vaccine is not accepted as a possible cause of various injuries, patients are often left to seek out information and resources outside of the standard healthcare system. While some are able to find help and relief through various support groups, many are unable to find treatment at all or are further exploited by pseudo-scientific medical practitioners.

¹⁵ See Kilpatrick 2021 (October and December) for more examples of epistemic injustice related to the COVID-19 vaccine in a professional healthcare setting.

¹⁶ The politically polarizing nature of the “Twitter Files” of course raises potential concerns about the credibility of the source. However, Taibbi is an award-winning journalist and does provide evidence to support his claims. This, I think, warrants at least considering the worthiness of such a source.

¹⁷ See Head 2023. Head notes a similar issue about misinformation and vaccine injury in the UK: “In very rare cases though, vaccines can be linked to serious injuries and even death. Vaccine injuries (also often called adverse events) are a difficult area in which to carry out research or advocacy, partly because anti-vaccine communities persistently muddy the waters with misinformation and abuse. This does a disservice to those who have a genuine vaccine injury.” (Head 2023)

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Art in the Time of AI: Style and Artistic Intention in AI-generated Images

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Abstract

Drawing on recent debates about the intersection of art and artificial intelligence (AI), as well as philosophical definitions of art, this article proposes an intentionalist and human-oriented approach to artistic AI-generated images via services such as Midjourney or DALL-E. First, the approach is human-oriented because, at least at the time we are writing this article, the algorithmic intelligence behind image generation has not reached the level of a genuine artificial “mind” that would eventually perform all the functions of a biological mind or human personality in the process of art-making. Therefore, the specific intention to create art and the expression of a certain mental or emotional representation through art, that is, the abilities typically expected of artists, show that human intervention remains indispensable in the creative process, although faced with the specific constraints of a new medium. Second, the approach is intentionalist in that it is a certain concept of human intention in relation to art that gives meaning to the tendencies favored by AI-generated imagery, such as the imitation and revival of past styles or the conceptual nature of this form of art itself, by deliberately using these tendencies in the continuation of previous art practices and styles.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, art, artwork, image, aesthetics, style

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² **Authorship contribution statement:** Radu-Cristian Andreescu (Author 1, Corresponding author): Conceptualization, Writing – original draft; Dan Eugen Raţiu (Author 2): Supervision, Writing – review and editing.

Introduction

This article addresses a specific, yet ongoing and evolving phenomenon at the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and new media art, namely the artistic images generated by converting natural language descriptions (prompts) into images through artificial intelligence networks via services such as Midjourney, DALL-E, Craiyon, Stable Diffusion, NightCafé or Wombo Dream, which have gained significant popularity among artists and amateur users alike since early 2022. We seek to determine the extent to which AI-generated images can count as art with respect to two core concepts that have historically been used to define and describe art as art: the ability to *imitate* reality or previous artistic models, and the ability to *express* a human artist's personality, imagination or inner life. While a certain form of imitation or mimicry designates an aspect of the AI-generated art phenomenon that we call "classical revival" in a sense which will be explained in Section 3, the expression of an artist's inner thinking process (namely the ideas expressed in words as prompts, as well as the artist's decision to favor a certain artistic style by using certain parameters) constitutes the conceptual aspect of AI-generated art that we will address in Section 4. In short, the concept we propose in order to bring these two aspects of AI-generated art together is that of *artistic intention*, which has already proved to be very useful in discussions about the definition of art and the identification of artworks in general. Drawing on Arthur Danto's and Jerrold Levinson's theories, we will show that an artist's intention is precisely what allows us to account for art's essential relation to artworks and styles from the near or distant past by virtue of a certain artworld or history of art. Yet, the idea of an artist's intention relates the work not only to previous forms of art, but also to the mental activity of the author who uses prompts as a means of artistic expression. However, in the case of AI-generated art, the constraints are twofold in relation to the artist's intention. This medium seems to involve a bidirectional process, in the sense that the concept that human authors express as an input in prompts influences the visual outcome of verbal descriptions and vice versa: unlike the arts based on

notations or unchanging instructions, AI-generated art constrains the artists themselves to modify or adjust their verbal descriptions during the process of generating images according to outcomes that may not match their original intention. Hence, even though generative AI technology offers infinite possibilities just like the human imagination itself, this type of medium is not free of constraints, as the human creative intention and the visual possibilities it uncovers seem to influence each other, so that artists' ideas have to adapt to the possibilities of the medium.

The main difficulty of any approach to AI-related phenomena is the fact that the object of research is constantly evolving, so that it seems impossible for any research to provide permanent solutions. However, while AI-generated imagery is a relatively new phenomenon in both art history and the history of technology, some remarkable insights have been offered by scholars and artists who already addressed topics such as authorship, arthood, intentionality, creativity, artistic value, and style in connection with this "new paradigm" of artistic creation (see Steinert 2017, Elgammal 2018, Du Sautoy 2019, Manovich and Arielli 2021, Anscomb 2022, Meyer 2023). In 2018, years before the spread of services such as DALL-E or Midjourney, an AI-generated image titled *Portrait of Edmond de Belamy* was sold at auction by Christie's for a surprisingly high price. Although enthusiastically described as independent of the human mind in that the technology that generated it did not execute a predetermined plan, the portrait was the indirect result of the work of a collective of artists who used machine learning technology to train an algorithm on a collection of 15,000 human-made portraits created over a period of five centuries. On that occasion, Ahmed Elgammal (2018) accurately described AI-generated art as conceptual art by referring to an aspect that we will also emphasize: what matters is not so much the outcome (which might not always be aesthetically appealing), but the creative process and the idea behind the work. This view leads to interesting questions about the authorship and artistic agency of humans and machines alike. Claire Anscomb (2021, 2022) has recently provided an answer that constitutes as well one of the key assumptions of

this article: on the one hand, art is characterized by intentionality in a broad sense, so that, as photography *qua* art shows us, an object can be art without necessarily coming from an artist's *hand*; on the other hand, AI agents themselves, at least at their current stage of development, are neither artists, since it is doubtful that they possess intentionality and a deep semantic understanding of their work, nor co-authors, since co-authorship implies the synchronization of intentions that only humans seem capable of (Anscomb 2022, 35). Yet, such agents, Anscomb argues, are not mere passive tools either, but rather a kind of creative partners, for they can actively contribute to a work that has an artistic value by influencing some aesthetically relevant and unanticipated formal properties (although the artistic value is not necessarily synonymous with aesthetic value). Emanuele Arielli goes a step further by suggesting the possibility of developing a posthuman and non-anthropocentric notion of *agency* that would allow us to account for mechanical processes and non-human entities (Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 3, 24-25). However, the broad notion of agency is not necessarily synonymous with intentionality and it is doubtful that the mere agency of non-human entities can turn them into artists.

In contrast, Steffen Steinert (2017) has adopted an intentionalist view that partly coincides with our approach, since he convincingly demonstrates that the ability of the so-called “creative machines” to produce art is traceable to human intentions. Thus, Steinert argues that there is no need to speculatively attribute a mysterious artistic agency to machines in order to say that they make art. It is sufficient to say that they are produced and used according to an intended outcome, namely art-making, and are thus bound to a human intention, although the degree of human involvement is considerably lower when compared to non-autonomous artifacts (Steinert 2017). However, in his 2017 article, Steinert is not referring to widely available services such as DALL-E or Midjourney (which had not yet been launched), but to particular creative machines such as a musical robot that plays alongside human musicians by improvising while listening to their performance or a generative computer program that “draws” and “paints” by

simulating different artistic media, tools, and emotions. What is indeed characteristic of these machines is that their proper function envisaged by their human creators is precisely to embody knowledge about art and to produce a certain kind of *artworks*, regardless of the fact that humans do not directly monitor or interfere with the subsequent creative process. However, the prompt-based image generation services bring some slight differences into this picture. First, Roland Meyer (2023) has recently provided an interesting insight into how prompt-based generation really works: rather than being a system of instructions and interpretation, Meyer argues, prompts involve a process of “navigation and matching” similar to Google search engine, the difference being that what they are looking for is not something existing, but something merely possible, resulting from a combinatorial dream logic. Thus, the prompts would be not so much means of production as “generative search queries”, in other words, “a search process that produces what it is looking for” by “narrowing down selections” in a virtual archive of latent possibilities (Meyer 2023, 104-106). Second, although usually labeled as “AI *art* generators”, prompt-based services generate *images*, which is not the same as generating works of art, since not all images are art (Anscomb 2022). Just like a camera, AI technology can be used in all these cases to produce any kind of image, artistic or not, especially since the databases that algorithms have been trained on in order to “learn” to generate images comprise all kinds of images, from high art to media, from masterpieces to ordinary photographs. Yet, the difference we are interested in is not the mere difference between an image that resembles a painting by Vermeer and an image that looks like a non-artistic photograph in a family album. The difference lies in the intention with which the technology is used, regardless of the aesthetic features generated (which in any case cannot be fully anticipated by the user): one can use the technology to show that it can generate a Vermeer-esque image, hiding the fact that the image is the result of a machine and thus testing the machine’s ability to fool the human observer. But is it not doubtful that using a machine in order to show that it can compete with human artists and eventually become their rival

constitutes a genuine *artistic* intention? We argue that this kind of technology, regardless of its supposed autonomy, is linked to humans by something more than the original human intention manifested by those designers and engineers who created those systems for the purpose of creating art or images. Since, as Claire Anscomb argues, these systems are not as autonomous as they are believed to be, a human artistic intention must nevertheless be present in each individual creative process, even if the exact aesthetic features of the outcomes remain unpredictable. This is possible precisely because, as we know thanks to artists such as Duchamp or philosophers of art such as Arthur Danto, what makes an object “art” is not necessarily a constellation of certain sensory properties.

1. Non-human, yet still too human?

1.1. From aesthetic objects to works of art

Although there are today other forms of art in which artificial intelligence appears to be equally creative, such as generating music or poetic texts, our analysis is limited to text-to-image models for several reasons. First, the very principle of linking words to images interestingly relates prompt-based image generation to an ancient historical affinity between words and images, between literature and painting: Horace’s famous phrase *ut pictura poesis*, Simonides’ claim that painting is silent poetry and poetry is speaking painting, or the practice of ekphrasis as a literary or rhetorical description of a visual artwork are some illustrative examples. This does not mean, of course, that prompt-based AI art is literary art, but rather that it seems to reiterate the historical (and also natural) image-making power of language. However, it is noteworthy that human control is not limited to the verbal descriptions used in prompts, even though these descriptions constitute, in the case of services such as Midjourney or DALL-E, the main way of creating images. At more advanced levels, human creators can feed an algorithm a particular collection of data depending on the pattern they want to obtain, just as they can input their own creations based on which AI technology can produce

variations. Moreover, human control also continues in the “post-production” phase of creation, since users can choose from the potentially infinite variation of images that AI technology generated those images that best match the idea they envisaged, and they can also edit the images using editors such as Photoshop (which has also included in its latest versions AI-based tools such as a prompt-based generative fill function to modify and transform images more easily and rapidly).

Yet, beyond the natural and historical affinity between words and images, there is an even more important argument for focusing on text-to-image models of creation. What we are particularly interested in is precisely the way in which human creativity is involved in and influenced by artificial intelligence technology, and it is indeed human creativity that appears to be particularly prominent in the case of expressing an idea in words that are later converted into an image. If we look at this phenomenon considering the processes of artificial intelligence only, then the lack of artistic intention (or the lack of intention *tout court*) that characterizes AI networks as machines does not necessarily mean that the object they are able to generate cannot be aesthetic. Indeed, there are aesthetic objects produced without a conscious intention, such as the natural beauty of a landscape (see Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 3, 11). However, there is a difference between an aesthetic object such as a beautiful flower or landscape, which does not require a creative intention, and an artistic object, which does. As Jerrold Levinson puts it, “regarding something as a work of art is subtly different from regarding something as if it were a work of art” (Levinson 2011, 39). Yet the mere intention to bring into being something over which we have no further intentional control does not seem to meet the criteria for creating art: would it be enough to simply ask an artificial intelligence to compose a melancholic song in order to declare oneself an artist or to be able to claim that one has created art? Analogously, a gardener has the intention of planting a flower, but the beauty they will bring to existence will be that of a natural aesthetic object, not an artistic one, since the very aspect of the object is not designed by humans. Then again, one can quickly see that the difference is not absolute, but rather

gradual, since a landscape gardener can create garden art. As a matter of fact, Immanuel Kant listed landscape gardening among Fine Arts as a kind of painting which combines the very natural objects according to an artistic idea and therefore creates art directly with nature's materials (Kant 1987, 192). Thus, a landscape artist can exert partial control over the garden as artistic object by shaping the form of paths, trees and vegetation and thus expressing something of their imagination, even though the natural process of growth remains, of course, independent of their intentional control. This is also the case with art forms that presuppose an even freer relationship with nature. Joseph Beuys's project of planting 7,000 oak trees in Kassel, as well as various works of land art or earth art, already involves the combination of an artistic initiative and the contingency of a more or less predictable future evolution. Nevertheless, the artist's intention lies not only in the initiative of planting the trees, but also in the act of investing this natural creation with a certain meaning concerning art, existence or society that originates precisely from the artist's mind.

This is not to say that, when it comes to AI-generated poetry or music, humans could not have access to certain parameters that influence the final result or that they could not subsequently modify that result according to their preferences. What is essential, however, is that the human control over the work should lead us to the mind behind the creative process. As Emanuele Arielli points out, we can think, on the one hand, of aesthetic objects whose symbolic intention or meaning is absent or insignificant, insofar as our engagement with them is purely hedonic. This is not only the case with the aforementioned natural beauty (although even natural beauty can often be attributed a higher symbolic meaning related, for instance, to the harmony of the world) but also with the design of industrial objects, wallpaper patterns, and so on. But, on the other hand, major works of art have always seemed to embody a certain meaning concerning art, society, existence or the life experience of the artist who created them (Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 3, 20-22). It is in this sense that Van Gogh's life may be, at least in part, constitutive of the appreciation of his paintings,

just as the history of a people is constitutive of the interpretation of its artistic heritage. One might be tempted to think that the difference is due to the various degrees of aesthetic complexity: after all, a Van Gogh painting is far more aesthetically complex than the pattern of wallpaper. However, this is not always the case. Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes are replicas of commercial packaging, yet they bear a meaning by virtue of the artistic status that their ordinary twins from the supermarket lack, despite having the same design. Thus, the idea of human control over AI-generated works means first and foremost the ability to invest the work with a meaning that allows the viewer to discern the mind behind the work in such a way that the work itself becomes expressive of a certain personal, cultural, spiritual or social background.

Still, this is not to say that the element of chance or randomness must always be eliminated. The artists of the Dada movement might have integrated randomness into their art, but this is precisely one of the features that express their vision of art. Although AI-generated works are unexpected without being purely random (since they are the result of training the algorithm on a certain amount of data), it can indeed be said that AI-generated art raises the same question that Marcel Duchamp or the Dadaists had already raised in the twentieth century, namely "What is Art?". However, whereas Duchamp and the Dadaists used ready-mades or random elements to intentionally challenge certain definitions of art, an artificial network that produces a text or an image, at least at the current stage of its evolution, is not consciously making a statement about art, since it lacks personal attitudes such as Duchamp's critique of "retinal art" or Dadaists' strong commitment to principles such as provocation, nihilism, and transgression. Although, as we will show in the following, an AI network may have learned certain patterns from the history of art through the data it was fed with, a human author is still needed in order for an AI machine to create art that challenges the boundaries of art itself. The reason for this is precisely the fact that artistic intention is crucial in identifying something as art, and not as a mere technological miracle which, although entertaining or appealing, can be called art only metaphorically

(in the same way natural beauty can) or only in a narrow, hedonic or purely aesthetic sense of the term, in which the artistic intention is negligible (as in the case of decorative art).

1.2. From human intention to artistic intention

Therefore, AI-generated art *qua* art requires human intention in a triple sense. First, a human initiative is needed in order for a work to come into being, since the current AI technology lacks the inherently human *will* to create. Second, a human intervention is needed in order for the human author to shape their work in such a way that it reflects at least partially their imagination. Third, a human interpretation is needed in order for the work to be regarded as art and to eventually embody a meaning of what art is. One must indeed establish the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for something to be considered art in order to determine whether AI-generated images qualify as art. We follow Arthur Danto (1981, v-vi) in pointing out that, ever since Duchamp's ready-mades, it is not the physical participation of the artist in the act of creation that necessarily links the artist to their work, but a certain intention manifested through the work itself. A broader definition of what artist participation is needs to be adopted in order not to exclude AI-generated images from the sphere of art simply because the artist's involvement is too limited: as Claire Anscomb points out, some previous forms of art already show that human control over the works of art is not always limited to the physical action of the artist's body (Anscomb 2021). The mere human intention to simply *produce* something is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to define something as art. On the one hand, as we have shown earlier, there are indeed aesthetic objects that are neither the result nor the expression of any human artistic intention and consequently do not qualify as art (except metaphorically), as in the case of a beautiful natural landscape. On the other hand, there are, of course, objects that are the result of human intentions without necessarily being aesthetic objects, let alone works of art, since it is obvious that not everything that is human-made qualifies as art. Conversely, as ready-mades, prehistoric artifacts that are subsequently artfied or even natural objects such as earth

or rocks that artists exhibited in galleries *qua* art show us, there are works of art whose physical existence is not the result of an *artistic* intention to *produce* them, so that the artistic intention lies in something different than the initial physical production of the object (see Levinson 2011, 12).

This confirms the hypothesis that art does not necessarily require the artist to actually manipulate the physical configuration of a work, so it seems to support the claim that AI-generated images can truly qualify as art. Yet, it also shows something different, namely that the intention that defines a process of artistic creation is not to be confused with the intention to bring an object into existence, since the intention of an artist exhibiting a ready-made is not to produce something whose production is by definition artist-independent. Therefore, the artistic intention that differentiates art from non-art must lie in something other than the mere act of bringing something into being by producing it. As we have already suggested before, it is unlikely that one can qualify as a composer by virtue of initiating a process whereby an artificial intelligence technology has created a melody. Nonetheless, the nature of such a creation is still far from obvious. One might say that in this case, AI technology is the artist, and therefore its creation is art. Although we will return to the question of whether AI is capable of creating something under the same conditions as a human does, we can reject this hypothesis by recalling that AI-generated art *qua* art must be the manifestation, albeit an indirect one, of a human artistic intention, although the technological mediation that separates the artist from the final result is considerably more complex than in previous forms of art. Moreover, as we have suggested, an AI-generated object, be it an image, a song or a poem, needs a human intention to create it in order to simply exist, since the technology that produces it lacks the *will* or *initiative* to bring it into being.

Yet, the object needs an additional intention in order to become a work of *art*. We can exemplify this distinction by considering the case of an AI-generated image that mimics the style of Vermeer's paintings. One can use AI technology to produce such an image in order to technologically copy an

artistic style and thus show that a technology which lacks the human intention to create art can nevertheless simulate it by imagining a scene in the way Vermeer would have imagined it. In this case, technologically copying a style is not very different from using a camera to capture a painting. While the original painting is a work of art, copying it through photography is not. Similarly, using an AI technology to benefit from its performance *qua* technology is not the same as making art. In contrast, using it for the purpose of making art essentially means to invest that image with an intention that expresses a certain statement in connection with art itself. Copying Vermeer's style can, in this case, mean parodying it, revitalizing it, enriching it, transforming it, and so forth. The fact that AI technology can copy an artist's style while producing a new, i.e. unique, image indicates the kind of imitation or variation this technology facilitates, namely one that can indeed enrich a collection of images by adding original images. Although AI-generated images do not, of course, automatically count as forgeries, the difference that Levinson notes between referential and inventive forgeries (Levinson 2011, 103) is applicable here. While, as we will exemplify in the following, AI technology can be used to explicitly target an artist's style by extracting a pattern, what it creates in this case is an *inventive* copy, not a referential one, in the sense that, in producing something unique, it does not imitate a particular existing artwork (as a referential forgery would).

2. Beyond aesthetic disappointment

2.1. From technology to art

We must distinguish between the misleading situation in which an AI-generated image passes as a human-authored work that fools the viewer in order to show how accurate and deceiving a technology can be and the situation in which an artist uses technology that copies the style of a past artist in order to express, by this very imitation, an intention related to irony, pastiche, mannerism, revival, hybridization, remix and other practices which, as we will see in the following, constitute certain principles or values of the artworld itself, at least at

certain moments in its history. The example of copying Vermeer's style by an AI agent is not accidental, as it refers to the strategy of a famous forger from the 1930s, Han Van Meegeren, who, in order to prove the quality of his painting technique, painted *The Supper at Emmaus* in Vermeer's style and claimed it to be a hitherto unknown painting by Vermeer himself, thus creating what Levinson calls an "inventive forgery" (Levinson 2011, 103). As Danto noted in commenting on this famous case of forgery, although the painting appears to express Vermeer's artistic intention, it only simulates that intention, since Vermeer could not have invested the painting with any artistic intention simply because he did not paint it (Danto 1981, 51). As for the forgery created by Van Meegeren, we can still follow Danto's remark: "Van Meegeren is after all in a different position altogether from an artist who happened, in 1935 or whenever, to paint in the manner of Vermeer and to make whatever statement such deliberate stylistic anachronisms would enable a painter to make: perhaps a statement about the decadence of the Dutch art of the time" (Danto 1981, 51).

A work can indeed be identified at one point as a genuine work of art, so that it may later be discovered to be a fake or a forgery. Similarly, someone may mistake an AI-generated image as a human-authored work and later find out that the image was artificially generated. In these cases, we seem to experience aesthetic disappointment, which has interesting consequences concerning the relationship between the origin of a work and the pleasure it gives us. The way in which we identify the origin of an aesthetic object as natural, human or artificial directly influences the extent to which the beauty of that object appeals to us (see Steinert 2017 for a similar remark concerning the way in which the evaluation of an AI-generated work might be influenced by the knowledge of its source). It might be instructive to recall the famous example of the nightingale given by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*. Listening to the song of the nightingale produces aesthetic delight, but if the listener were to discover that they had been deceived by actually listening to a mechanism that accurately mimics the song of nature, then what Kant called

the “intellectual interest” in that beauty and, along with it, the satisfaction of taste that appreciates beauty would immediately cease. This happens despite the fact that, from a strictly sensory point of view, the sensitive qualities of the song produced by the deceiving mechanism would be identical to those of nature: “[O]ur interest vanishes completely as soon as we notice that we have been deceived, that only art was involved; it vanishes so completely that at that point even taste can no longer find anything beautiful, nor sight any charming” (Kant 1987, 169). Without going into the details of Kant’s connection between the interest in natural beauty and the human moral vocation, we can argue that the extent to which AI-generated images appeal to us depends not only on their intrinsic sensible quality, but also on how we choose to identify the origin of that image production, recognizing it either as the work of algorithms or as the expression of an original human intention (even if the former can deceptively mimic the appearance of the latter). Yet, what we have to determine is precisely whether this difference is the mere result of the perception which grants an object a relative artistic status as indicated by relativist approaches to art, or is rooted in an essential distinctive property (namely, artistic intention) that, according to an essentialist approach to art, grants works the ontological status of art despite any possible miscategorizations.

The situation seems to be the opposite of that described by Kant: whereas the disappointment in the case of the nightingale is the result of the confusion between nature that lacks a *real* intention and art that presupposes such an intention, what seems to disappoint in the case of an AI-generated image is that the viewer has assumed the object to express a human intention where such intention would not exist. The situation is similar to the disappointment arising from the discovery that the painting attributed to Vermeer is a forgery due to the deceiving technique of a skillful forger. The intention that has been attributed to Vermeer in relation to what the painting expresses is revealed to be in fact inexistent. Whereas philosophers such as Nelson Goodman or Arthur Danto were primarily concerned with the distinctions to be

made between a work of art and a forgery or between a work of art and an identical ordinary twin, the distinction that seems to concern us today is precisely what a visual version of the Turing test would seek to determine while asking us to distinguish between a machine-produced creation and a human-produced one. The distinction remains relevant as long as the confusion will cause disappointment just like the mechanism that had been mistaken for a nightingale. But does this distinction always involve distinguishing between the two ontologically opposite categories of art and non-art? If so, it seems that an AI-generated object can never be art once its non-human origin is revealed: "It was not Vermeer who created this image, but a machine", one might exclaim. Indeed, discovering that an AI-generated image is not the expression of the inner experience and feelings of a human artist can be disappointing. On the other hand, however, if AI-generated art could genuinely be art, then it has to satisfy the condition of expressing an artistic intention that leads to a human author, no matter how technologically mediated their action on the resulting work may be. Disappointment no longer means that the object that has been considered human-made art is not art at all. Rather, it means ignoring the human artistic merit that makes AI-generated objects art under certain conditions. We argue that the appreciation or disappointment may depend on the ontological status of the object, as the nightingale's example shows us, but not vice versa: we endorse an essentialist view of art in the sense that the ontological status of art does not depend on mere appreciation or disappointment (see Levinson 2006, 17 and Levinson 2011, 10-11, especially his notion of "proprietary right" which basically shows us that we cannot "artify" what we do not own in a way or another), albeit it is defined by an intention to express something that, of course, is not to be confused with the intention to deceive that would define a mere fake. While not relativistic, this way of defining art *qua* art is nevertheless historical insofar as the artistic intention underlying the work only becomes possible in a certain context of the artworld in the sense indicated by Danto: not everything is art at any time precisely because a certain intention that creates art is not possible at every time (Danto

1981, 113). As we will show in the following, the aesthetic tendencies favored by AI technology, including, but not limited to, the imitation of past artistic styles, must become intelligible to the artworld itself in order for the concept of an intention to use them artistically to become possible.

As for Kant's example of the mechanism imitating the song of the nightingale, Kant is, of course, aware that art in general is not always disappointing: art is aesthetically appealing once the viewer perceives its resemblance to nature but is at the same time aware that it is only art (Kant 1987, 173). Yet, the illusion that an art or a technique might produce does not necessarily result in disappointment. According to a famous anecdote told by Pliny the Elder, the ancient painter Zeuxis painted grapes that looked so real that birds were fooled into coming to peck at them, while Parrhasius painted a curtain that looked so real that his rival Zeuxis was fooled into trying to draw it aside. The *trompe-l'oeil* effect does not suggest disappointment at an art that is easily mistakable for reality, but it emphasizes high artistic mastery and excellence of skill. Nevertheless, it does not seem plausible that the main criterion for appreciating art *qua* art throughout history has been the mere ability to fool the eye. Even techniques intended to deceive are not necessarily limited to imitating an appearance, since the example of the forgery created by Van Meegeren indicates that his deception consisted in simulating the *intention* and *style* attributed to Vermeer. However, while creations generated by an AI agent may appear to be technological miracles capable of deceptively mimicking human art, they can also be identified as art to the extent that they succeed in expressing a genuine and original artistic intention of a human author, beyond the mere deceptive imitations of human creations. Drawing on Kant's example, we can conclude that art is truly beautiful art, that is, an art capable of appealing to us aesthetically, when its essence lies in something other than a mere deceitful technique.

This might seem to suggest, however, that, contrary to what we have argued before, the way we perceive an AI-generated image as *either* technology *or* art would be decisive for its ontological status as technology *or* art. The issue can be

summarized as follows: does the fact of discovering that the work is not what we thought it was change the ontological status of the work or just the appreciation that turns into disappointment? As we have already suggested, in order for that appreciation to change the ontological status of the work, the ontological status would have to depend solely on that appreciation. Yet, it seems obvious that the appreciation might stem from a miscategorization of an object that in no way changes the category to which the object actually belongs: the forgery is still a forgery, and the mechanism that imitates the nightingale is only a mechanism, regardless of the category in which one would mistakenly place it and the appreciation that might follow from it. We can indeed assume a certain artistic intention in the case of a forgery wrongly attributed to Vermeer, but this intention, as Danto notes, does not exist *de facto*, since Vermeer is not the author of that forgery. Nevertheless, if an AI agent constitutes one art-making technology among others, then misidentifying the *technology* used by an artist might change the value ascribed to the work, but not its status as art. If the miscategorization that takes art as nature or technology as art results in disappointment, it does not mean that disappointment is always about the confusion between two opposite categories. Suppose an artist were to exhibit a photograph concealing the fact that the image had been edited in Photoshop. Even though the fact that they cheated might diminish the aesthetic appreciation granted to the work, this does not put them in the position of the forger, for it is still possible that they had a genuinely artistic intention to express through the technique they used. After all, art itself, like magic, does not always reveal its techniques precisely in order to maintain an attitude that would otherwise turn into disappointment. This does not, however, negate the distinction we indicated earlier between technology *qua* technology and technology as a way of making art: photography or Photoshop can be used, for example, by tourists, engineers or journalists for various non-artistic purposes. Barring any confusion, the ontological status of art and non-art will indeed generate corresponding reactions. But the ontological status of the work of art as art depends on a certain artistic intention,

which, as contemporary art usually shows us, is not so much to appeal as to *express* something. Someone may misinterpret the outline of a forest they see in the distance at night as a castle because they do not perceive the feature that allows them to differentiate between a forest and a castle, despite the fact that the two objects may have common features, such as their shape at night from a certain distance.

However, the conditions under which an object is a castle seem relatively stable and clear, whereas the conditions under which an object is a work of art might considerably change over time, for, as Danto's ontological approach to the definition of art shows us, they do not depend on the perceptual properties of the objects. According to the famous example given by Danto, a necktie covered in paint is not art if produced by Cezanne, but it is art if produced a few decades later by Picasso, by virtue of a certain historical context of the artworld that enabled Picasso to have the intention of making art out of a tie, even though both Cezanne and Picasso were artists: while Cezanne might have used the tie to simply wipe his brush after painting, Picasso might have grasped the historical possibility of a concept that would allow him to transform the tie into a work of art in the same way he had already transfigured other ordinary objects (Danto 1981, 46-47). We can say that the works of art are *ontologically* distinct from ordinary objects in that they express a certain artistic intention, yet it is clear that the content of that intention, which makes a work art at a particular point in history, can vary: Watteau, for instance, wanted to express something quite different through his paintings than Duchamp did through his ready-mades. By the same token, as Danto points out, Duchamp's ready-mades could not have been art a few centuries earlier, during Watteau's time (Danto 1981, 45). And the same could be said of AI-generated images. By the time generative AI programs and services such as DALL-E and Midjourney became popular, the use of cutting-edge technology to produce art had long been known, since digital art and biotech art, for example, had already made history in recent decades. But this kind of continuity in recent history is not the only reason.

2.2. *From innovation to history*

One can imagine that a modern artist of the nineteenth century might be unfamiliar with the reasons that should make them accept AI-generated images as art, regardless of the fact that they are produced by artists who have already practiced art in previous forms such as painting, digital art, graphics, and so on. Just as Baudelaire contemptuously compared photography to typography in order to accuse artists who began to practice photography of lacking imagination, one can imagine he would similarly accuse artists who use AI technology of lacking originality. And this thought experiment could go further, for an avant-garde artist whose aim is to free creation from the shadow of the past by metaphorically destroying museums, libraries, and academies in the emphatic manner described by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti is unlikely to approve of an art form that relies on algorithms trained precisely on a collection of past works (although we will have to address the reasons why AI-generated art shows that creation *ex nihilo*, that is, free of any influence, is in fact impossible even for modern and avant-garde artists). As we have already suggested, the artistic intention to express something through AI-generated images is subject to certain constraints that are in fact inherent to any particular form of art. In order for that intention to make works of art out of AI-generated images, the tendencies that AI technology favors as a result of those constraints must become intelligible to the artworld itself. It seems plausible that the intention to create AI-generated images would not have constituted a genuine intention to create art at a different time in history, not because the technology would not have been possible, but because its tendencies would not have counted as valuable artistic tendencies.

One might describe this connection in reference not to the institutional atmosphere of the artworld, but to the historical development of art. As Levinson's famous intentional-historical definition of art shows us, the intention of making art always makes us look back in the history of art, since art essentially involves, albeit not always consciously, its predecessors (Levinson 2011, 4). According to Levinson, art-making intentions are historical in the sense that the art of a

particular moment, in order to be art, is intentionally related to something that is art prior to it, even in the case of antagonistic relations projected by revolutionary forms of art (Levinson 2011, 13-17). This is not to say that new art merely seeks an external resemblance to the art of the past, nor that it seeks to afford the same aesthetic or hedonic experiences that previous artworks afforded (since the same features or experiences could also be found in non-art). New artworks, Levinson argues, are intended to be regarded in the way in which previous artworks are *correctly* regarded, that is, excluding categorizations that would, for example, treat works of art as instrumental objects and consequently use Da Vinci's paintings as thermal insulation (Levinson 2011, 8-10). This definition leads to a similar conclusion, since it implies that an object might not be a work of art at a given moment if at that moment it is not intended to be regarded in a way that is already a correct way of regarding an artwork (Levinson 2011, 13).

This concept of "correct regard for an artwork" has interesting implications for AI-generated images, although it is not clear what it actually amounts to, since for Levinson's definition of art, the mere fact that such a regard *exists* is more important than its particular content, which in any case varies considerably throughout history (Levinson 2011, 48-50). It is worth noting that programs and services such as DALL-E, Midjourney or Stable Diffusion are available to all (albeit the access is usually limited to subscriptions) so that images can be generated by art history experts and ignorant users, professional artists and amateurs alike. Let us consider Levinson's distinction between *intrinsic* and *relational* intention of art-making. An amateur user might want to create an aesthetically relevant image, and while they are probably aware of the existence of art history (unlike the naïve creator of prehistoric art, for example), their intention to create a work of art using Midjourney might not be what Levinson calls a *specific* art-conscious intention: the creator might intend a complex of regards that might be accorded to their work without invoking or having in mind particular artworks, traditions, or movements of the past. Their work qualifies as art precisely because the regard they intended while creating

their work happens to coincide with one already accorded to other works, whether kitsch, low art or high art (Levinson 2011, 39-40). In contrast, some artists might use Midjourney with a *relational* intention to make art, that is, focusing deliberately on certain works of art from the past and envisaging the same regards accorded to previous works, whatever those regards may be (Levinson 2011, 40). Thus, an artist creating an imitation after a past work might intend the work for the same regard accorded to past works that were themselves imitations or variations of other works, such as Picasso's variations on Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. This is not to say, however, that the work is intended for the same regard as the work it imitates. Picasso's twentieth-century variations might suggest a different regard than Velázquez's seventeenth-century painting.

As we have stressed before, every form of imitation, variation, pastiche or classical revival that might characterize AI-generated images *qua* art must become intelligible to the artworld itself or be accorded the same regard that has already been accorded to other works. This is not to say, however, that AI-generated works would seek an external resemblance to works of the past: even if AI technology can imitate a style, it will still produce unique images. Nor does it mean that artists using AI technology cannot look back to past art precisely in order to *avoid* a particular style or regard accorded to previous works. While experimenting with artistic creation on Midjourney, Lev Manovich pointed out that some of an artist's efforts to create aesthetically pleasing images should be directed towards avoiding a default style that might be regarded as kitschy, stereotypical or melodramatic (Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 5, 14-15). The result of this kind of effort is particularly visible in the case of landscapes generated by Manovich on Midjourney (and subsequently edited in Lightroom) in the style of Peter Bruegel: the artist had to customize and control the process of creation so as to successfully deviate from a default output that, instead of reproducing Bruegel's style, would have produced some kitsch aesthetics more similar to Disney cartoons than sixteenth-century paintings. However, to invoke Bruegel via AI-generated images does not mean to seek to express what Bruegel

expressed through his paintings in his own time. The concept of imitation or variation based on works of the past actually involves two layers. First, it implies a reference to the artist or work whose style is being imitated, but not in the sense that the new work is intended to be regarded in an *identical* manner. That is to say, an artist using AI technology to imitate Bruegel's or Rembrandt's style is in a very different position from an apprentice in Bruegel's or Rembrandt's studio. Manovich's images invoking Bruegel are not merely a way of "making Bruegel", but rather a way of enriching or recombining in novel ways existing styles and visual languages capable of providing aesthetic delight, that is, a kind of regard which is considerably broader than the regard accorded to Bruegel's works. In other words, while the artist's intention in this case is relational, it does not necessarily aim to accord the work the same kind of regard typically accorded to Bruegel's own works. An AI-generated artwork will inevitably be regarded in light of what it means *in the twenty-first century* to make art, that is, in the light of the artistic development up to the present. Second, a work that imitates in one form or another finds a predecessor not only in the works it imitates, but also in works that imitated before it. This is why this tendency favored by AI technology in visual creation is already intelligible to the artworld. To create a work that imitates a previous style, artist or work is to intend the work for that kind of regard that has already grasped the sense of irony, the revival, the eclecticism or the deliberate anachronism when accorded to previous imitative works. To explain this, we will describe this phenomenon using the concept of "classical revival".

3. AI-generated art as classical revival

As with the conceptual aspect of AI-generated art that we will address in the next section, the so-called "classical revival" does not exclusively characterize AI-generated images. In the sense which concerns us here, this concept refers to a specific phenomenon in the history of art, which consisted rather in a return to the traditional form of painting by using brush and canvas again, as opposed to a certain modernist experimentalism concerning (but, of course, not limited to)

artistic techniques. Classical revival is a defining feature of a certain “neoclassical” postmodernism in architecture and painting as described most notably by Charles Jencks, who, contrary to some interpretations of postmodernism that he denounced as confusions, separated postmodernism as such from postwar forms of “late modernism” still characterized by radical experimentalism, avant-garde tendencies, innovation, formalism, the rejection of figuration and ornamentation in painting and architecture respectively and so on. By contrast, the neoclassical tendency of postmodernism, which, according to Jencks, initially emerged as a counter-culture in relation to a certain cultural and institutional hegemony of modernism, would consist precisely in the revaluation of those past elements of tradition that modernism often considered outdated (Jencks 1986, 25-38; Rătiu 2012, 287-290). The 1970s and 1980s movements such as the Italian trans-avant-garde and German neo-expressionism, as well as artists such as Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi, Georg Baselitz, R.B. Kitaj, Gérard Garouste, and Carlo Maria Mariani epitomize this tendency by reviving not only painting as a genre, but also figuration, symbolism, emotion, allegory, portrait, narrative painting or even mythic imagery. The new use of motifs of the classical past inevitably combined with the worldview of the more recent modern past results, in the case of these movements, in an eclecticism described by Jencks as a “double coding” that subordinates postmodernism to both the classical past and the more recent modern past.

Hence, the aesthetic of neoclassical postmodernism is distinctive in that it involves the use of classical motifs against the background of a modern experience of the world, that is, a beauty which is often distorted or parodied as a result of the dissolution of the classical worldview of cosmic harmony, thus deviating from the metaphysical premises of the canonical classicism of the Greeks and the Renaissance (Jencks 1987, 31-32; Rătiu 2012, 293-295). Instead, what is characteristic of AI-generated images seems to be precisely the fact that, given its impressive heterogeneity, it has no distinctive style. Some of the experiments aimed at generating artistic images through AI technology may indeed seem to evoke the style of postmodern

artists such as Carlo Maria Mariani or Komar and Melamid via the ironic use of mythical or allegorical motifs presented to a modern perception that tries to reconcile the past with the present, the biblical angels and the machines, the medieval knights and the astronauts, the Greek goddesses and the modern anxieties, the archetypal figures and the fragmented contemporary universe. A similar postmodern tendency is exemplified by an experiment carried out by Jeff Hayward, who used DALL-E to apply Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionist style to the depiction of Marilyn Monroe which is typically associated with Andy Warhol's famous diptych (Hayward 2022): the result seems surprisingly reminiscent of the style of a postmodern painter such as Enzo Cucchi, and is indeed postmodern insofar as it combines abstraction and figuration, in contrast to a certain evolution of modernism which regarded the abstract as opposed to the figurative. Yet, there is no technical or logical impediment preventing AI technology from emulating modern abstract painting as well or from returning to the innocent or optimistic idealization found in canonical classicism, such as the perfect body of the ancient Greek sculpture or the feminine pulchritude and gracefulness of Botticelli's paintings. In fact, as Roland Meyer has pointed out, unlike a classical museum collection, AI models do not treat style as a historical, honorific, hierarchical or strictly individual category, but as a mere visual pattern that can be extracted from any collection of images: consequently, as Meyer argues, the style that AI technology can imitate is an inclusive and non-hierarchical category, as it encompasses the specific aesthetics of historical artistic movements such as classicism, expressionism, surrealism and so on, the brushstrokes of a famous artist such as Van Gogh, but also the stereotypes of commercial genres and the specific look of previous media such as photography and film (Meyer 2023, 107).

Two things are worth noting at this stage. First, the anachronism that imitating certain styles entails does not manifest itself in the mere aesthetic qualities of the image: unlike a painting that deliberately recreates a classical beauty which appears to be distorted by the disharmony of the modern world, the anachronism in AI-generated art need not rely on

evident and deliberate aesthetic contrasts (which sometimes, given the generation process and its unpredictable results, can hardly be anticipated by the artists themselves). In other words, since an AI-generated image may not deviate at all from the aesthetic of canonical classicism in terms of its specific look, what indicates, for instance, the ironic use of such an anachronism is precisely the fact that, as we have stressed before, one must be aware of the historical moment and the conditions under which the work was produced in order to realize that the artist's intention, although appearing to imitate, say, Botticelli, is different from that of Renaissance artists, however similar the images may be. As Danto wrote in the 1980s, "if today an artist exhibits a painting in the style of Watteau, we should hesitate before declaring him out of date", precisely because "this may be a self-conscious archaism, in which case he stands in a very different relationship to the Rococo style than Watteau would have done" (Danto 1981, 45).

Second, not only can AI-generated images be intentionally anachronistic in the sense that they emulate or recombine past artistic styles, but, as Meyer points out, their aesthetics are also inclusive and non-hierarchical in the sense that they borrow any visual pattern, whether from high art or popular culture, masterpieces or ordinary images, regardless of their origin or artistic value. Just as a certain post-modern art integrated, reinterpreted, and recombined the classical and the modern traditions into a paradoxical mixture that reveals what Charles Jencks called the "double-coding" (Jencks 1986, 32-38), the AI-generated art, which is already a post-postmodern or meta-modern phenomenon, relates in an inclusive way to the past, whether classical, modern or postmodern, and to the visual archives in general, whether artistic (such as Van Gogh), commercial (cartoons, TV series or comic books) or technical (photography and film). Therefore, it seems plausible to describe AI-generated images in postmodern terms when it comes to their inclusive relation to the past, focusing in particular on how they are produced: AI networks are trained on gigantic and unstructured collections that encompass an entire history of existing art and cultural artifacts, from classical to modern, from Botticelli and Poussin to Picasso and

Pollock, but also from high art to low art and commercial genres. While AI-generated art may express modern values of progress, innovation and novelty as a cutting-edge *technology*, it nevertheless seems to favor principles such as recycling, remixing, eclecticism, kitsch, mimicry or hybridization when it comes to its most prominent aesthetic features as *art*.

On the one hand, these effects are due to the way in which image production generally takes place, namely by combining or reconfiguring disparate elements of previous experiences, since no image can arise *ex nihilo*. What is noteworthy, however, is that while AI technology seems to be able to generate any image, the source of imitation and “inspiration” is in some ways more limited, although not quantitatively, but qualitatively: as Roland Meyer puts it, services like Midjourney, DALL-E or Stable Diffusion do not offer “images of the world, but images of images” precisely because, unlike previous techniques, the generation process does not use a model of physical reality according to the laws of optics and perspective, but visual patterns extracted from a “flat” and completely immanent (that is, with no natural referent) archive of existing images accompanied by textual information that links them to concepts (Meyer 2023, 108; Mazzone and Elgammal 2019, 7). On the other hand, once consciously adopted by artists using AI technology, this process seems to reflect a certain artistic and aesthetic statement that is postmodern (or post-modern) in a double sense. First, insofar as the stylistic resemblance of the images to works of the past is evident, artists can exploit this resemblance in an ironic manner, in the same way that, for example, Peter Blake’s postmodern painting *The Meeting or ‘Have a Nice Day, Mr. Hockney!’* is an ironic and explicit re-working of Gustave Courbet’s *La Rencontre, ou ‘Bonjour, monsieur Courbet!’*. Second, this process is post-modern in a more subtle sense, namely in the sense that it overcomes the modern focus on innovation by liberating itself from the illusory pursuit of absolute novelty. The very principle of algorithms shows that the AI-generated art is a new form of “classical” art in the sense that the technology that generates it learns from the art of the past in contrast to certain modern avant-gardes that aimed to

simply erase the traces of past influences. In this respect, as Manovich and Arielli remind us, AI technology seems indeed to resemble those traditional art forms that relied not so much on free and spontaneous invention as on craft and learning from masters, although the way a machine learns by extracting, for example, a visual pattern is, of course, considerably different from the way in which an artist used to learn their art in a studio or Academy (Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 3, 18-19). Yet, this is not to say that modern art was free of any influences simply because it rejected the academic art of that time: as Manovich has pointed out, modern artists have also been inspired, for example, by African art, Japanese prints or scientific discoveries of their time, so that their art inevitably reflects elements of a cultural history as any other art does (Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 5, 5-6). The influences of the past, however interpreted by the artists themselves, persist and are not limited to the postmodern revival of the classical in the 1970s and 1980s. After all, even if artists' intentions and strategies varied, it is no coincidence that Picasso made variations on Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, that Manet's *Olympia* was oddly reminiscent of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* or that Francis Bacon's *Figure with Meat* reinterprets and recombines motifs borrowed from a portrait of Pope Innocent X by Velázquez and a *Slaughtered ox* painted by Rembrandt.

Then again, as Emanuele Arielli concedes, although AI technology that generates art shows us that human creation itself might often be less spontaneous and more "imitative" than we thought, this does not mean that a machine and a human create under identical conditions (Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 3, 20-21). This is why we have chosen to reserve the term artist for humans only and to emphasize that the intention that transforms any AI-generated aesthetic object into art is an intention only humans seem capable of. This is particularly evident in the case of the simplest aesthetic objects created by artists, which nevertheless qualify as art precisely because a human creative process, which includes affective experiences, conscious intentions or personal beliefs that a machine ultimately lacks, is inseparable from the appreciation of the work of art. Picasso may have had very strong personal

and artistic motivations when he painted the variations on *Las Meninas*, that is, motivations that a machine could not have. And this applies not only to the expression of emotions, but also to the statements about art itself. A machine can generate an image that, strictly as a final product, might be as aesthetically pleasing as a Kandinsky, but it will not do so out of a belief about painting as Kandinsky did when writing about the spiritual in art.

4. AI-generated art as conceptual art

As we have stressed before, classical revival is not only characteristic of AI-generated images. It is also true, and perhaps even more obvious, that it does not characterize *all* such images either. Imitating, reviving, recombining, and parodying past artistic styles are not, of course, the only goals of artists who use services like DALL-E or Midjourney. Hence, the words used to describe AI-generated images should not be limited to imitation, pastiche, parody, neoclassicism, eclecticism, hybridization or mannerism. The broader notion of conceptual art would probably be more appropriate to describe the range of artistic intentions generally associated with text-to-image models of artificial intelligence. As the famous DALL-E image of the “astronaut riding a horse in photorealistic style” shows us, the essential part of the process seems to lie in the idea expressed in the prompts that leads us to the human mind behind, which seems in this respect more important than the potentially infinite variation of successful or failed images the technology can generate from that prompt. This is not to say, however, that the artist has a certain *image* in mind so that they bring it to life by technological means. If, as Roland Meyer argues, prompts are not so much a way of producing an intended outcome as a search query that is not constrained to match any previous image, not even a mental one (Meyer 2023, 105), then generating images using DALL-E or Midjourney is creation inasmuch as it is an exploration. Some spectacular, dream-like images generated in Midjourney such as Jason M. Allen’s *Théâtre d’Opéra Spatial* or Mohammad Qasim Iqbal’s *Silk and Stone Baroque Facades* are illustrative in this respect: they not only emulate the baroque or surrealist style (as a

certain style is inevitably detectable), but explore the possibility of combining and interweaving, for example, the visual properties of stone with those of silk, the aesthetic features of an opera stage with those of an SF background and so on.

Those works can be correctly described as conceptual and can even be conferred a cognitive value insofar as they reveal possibilities that the author could not have anticipated, but sought to discover. However, saying that a work of art is “conceptual” seems to have become a way of defending the artistic value of a work which, as in the case of Maurizio Cattelan’s banana or Salvatore Garau’s invisible sculpture, might be accused of not sufficiently revealing artistic mastery or excellence of skill. Insofar as one can trace the genesis of conceptual art in Duchamp’s ready-mades, for example, this shows that art is no longer a matter of form or sensory content destined to please the eye (that is, the famous “retinal art” denounced by Duchamp), but a matter of concept. Yet, this by no means indicates that painting or similar arts based on color, drawing and shapes are merely a matter of demonstrating the physical dexterity of painting or drawing. Otherwise, an abstract expressionist painting would be considered far less valuable than a rococo painting or even than the kitschy photo-realistic drawings sold by an amateur painter to tourists. Visual art always has a meaning, either about art itself or about society and the moral, religious, and other values it embodies. For instance, even an abstract painting can be interpreted according to Clement Greenberg’s formalism by considering the way in which it succeeds in revealing painting’s historical progress towards its own essence, namely the exploration of the literal flatness of the canvas as its distinctive medium and so on. However, the semantic complexity of a work can differ considerably. In a visual version of the Turing test whose purpose would be to distinguish between a work of art generated by a human artist and one generated by artificial intelligence, people are much more likely to be deceived by a non-figurative painting that copies, say, the style of Mark Rothko than by a classical painting that emulate Bruegel’s style: this is not to say, of course, that AI technology would necessarily create images of poor artistic quality, precisely

because it is not *a priori* clear what constitutes that artistic value in the first place: for Bruegel's artworld, the value of a painting might lie in its meaning or narrative content, whereas for the Impressionists the value would lie primarily in the effects of the play of light and color (see Anscomb 2022, 29-34).

The exploratory nature of image generation via AI technology becomes clearer, since the match and mismatch between prompts and outcomes indicate precisely the limits of the possibilities of certain combinations of styles and elements. Can we generate, for instance, images of today's New York in the style of Peter Bruegel? As Lev Manovich has pointed out while experimenting with Midjourney, style and its imitation are not only a matter of form but also of content (Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 5, 20-25). This concerns not only the possibility of artificial intelligence to generate a truly novel or original style (which is also an object of contention that we need to address), but also the logical possibility of any image-maker, whether human or artificial, to transfer an existing artistic style onto a different content (since a series of experiments in the field of AI art have already been done to this end): does Bruegel's style lie in some distinctive colors and shapes which can be transferred to a content such as modern skyscrapers, or does it lie rather in the subject of his paintings such as Flemish peasants and rural landscapes? This is not to say that successful separations of style from particular content could not be achieved: Jeff Hayward used DALL-E to extract Henri Matisse's style and apply it to Mona Lisa's portrait (Hayward 2022), just as Leon Gatys and his collaborators recreated an urban landscape of Tübingen in the style of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* and Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (Gatys et al. 2015).

This again seems to suggest that the main function of AI-based image generation is to simply copy and transfer existing styles. An experiment conducted by Ahmed Elgammal and his collaborators showed that this is not always the case. Elgammal has developed a Creative Adversarial Network (CAN), which, like other similar systems, learns about art and artistic styles from a huge collection of images from the past, but, unlike other systems, is at the same time able to deviate from established artistic styles (Elgammal et al. 2017). The

network succeeds in increasing the “stylistic ambiguity” (and eventually the originality) of the images it generates as the system incorporates a discriminator that penalizes the outcomes which fit into a pre-existing style, thus enabling the generator to produce stylistically novel works (Elgammal et al. 2017, Anscomb 2022, 21). Thereby, the network developed by Elgammal seeks to maintain a balance between two features that make a work aesthetically pleasing: on the one hand, the network does not deviate excessively from what art generally is, in order to give the viewer a sense of familiarity and avoid a disturbingly unfamiliar outcome; on the other hand, it increases the ambiguity of the style so that the work does not seem to repeat an already seen pattern (Mazzone and Elgammal 2019, 2-5).

Having seen that human creation is itself subject to influences from the past, one might be tempted to conclude that the machine can distance itself from these influences even better than a human can. This does not mean, however, that the network itself qualifies as artist simply because it seems capable of originality (after all, as we have shown before, there are human artists who consciously and deliberately paint in the style of other artists). The necessary condition for being an artist is not to avoid a repetitive aesthetic, but to express a certain artistic intention (which may even involve the repetition of an established artistic style). Claire Anscomb is right to stress that the network developed by Elgammal, while capable of stylistic innovation, is only following the reasons of its creators, so that it cannot fully qualify as a creative agent, let alone an artist (Anscomb 2022, 25-26). What is at stake here is not the imitation of a style or the deviation from established styles, but the fact that, in both cases, the machine has a univocal and mechanical relation to the art of the past. In contrast, artists usually tend to have passionate, personal, and ambiguous attitudes towards the art that preceded them. Avant-garde movements may come to mind, but the same is true of art in workshops and academies, in that the process of learning from the art of the masters was subjectively and consciously internalized as an essential condition of making art in the conscious of artists who had a certain subjective belief in art’s role (in the sense that they looked at the masters with

admiration, envy, ambition to surpass them, desire for recognition, or any other sentiments a machine lacks). Another way of putting this is that technology cannot explain in subjective terms the motivation behind deviating from a particular style, nor the meaning of its outcomes: Manet or any art critic could explain in a complex way the intention behind an aesthetic feature such as the seeming *non finito* in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, just as Kandinsky could offer a personal, subjective or spiritual motivation for the fact that the shapes are unrecognizable in his abstract paintings, whereas AI technology could only “say” that it followed the preferences of its creators. However, when it comes to AI agents as rivals or substitutes for human artists, this substitution is likely to take place precisely in those cases where the author’s intention or self-expression is negligible (see Manovich and Arielli 2021, chap. 3, 25): for instance, works such as industrial design, that would fall between the mere aesthetic objects without artistic intention and the major works of art. Yet, as minimal art often shows us, even when the expression of human subjectivity is obscured by an industrial or minimalist appearance, this can still be the result of a non-negligible intention and an essential statement about art itself.

5. Conclusions

Our approach to AI-generated images was intentionalist in order to ground the artistic status of these images on a concept already used in defining artworks. This analysis faces of course the difficulties intrinsic to an intentionalist approach. If artistic intention is constitutive of the work *qua* art, one may ask: should an image generated by AI be interpreted exclusively in terms of that intention? How is that intention visible in the first place? Indeed, since it is expressed in words (even if, as we have seen, the human control that materializes that intention is not limited to prompts), intention is constitutive of the understanding of a message. For instance, “Red Square” can mean either a place in Moscow or a geometric figure whose color is red depending on what the person who uttered those words intended to say. However, we must note two things. First, artistic intention is limited neither to the production nor

to the designation of an object. An artist who creates the image of an astronaut riding a horse in DALL-E does not communicate only by denoting that particular constellation of objects, but also by revealing an ineffable dimension of their personality, such as imagination, irony, dream, wit, fantasy, emotions, feelings, and so on. While AI technology is the cause of the particular aesthetic features of the various images that fall under a concept, it is the human author who should be credited with the concept itself that generated the images. In this respect, AI-generated art falls into the broader category of those art forms in which the artist is not directly executing the work themselves: in addition to music and architecture, one might think of Sol LeWitt's guidelines for making wall drawings that are the creation of the artist's mind without coming directly from the artist's hand. Even if the degree of compliance with the instructions might be higher than in the case of prompts used in "communicating" with AI technology, the instructions are open-ended so that the results might vary according to the draftsman's interpretations. Nevertheless, as Meyer has pointed out, the process of generating images from prompts is slightly different from a classical instruction-and-interpretation process, resembling more a "navigation-and-matching" process than a visual production triggered by words (Meyer 2023, 103): the art of using AI technology in order to generate images from language descriptions of a concept may require hours of "prompt engineering" precisely because, unlike instructions that presuppose a unidirectional influence in the creative process, prompts themselves can be modified in order to obtain a better match, so that the visual outputs determine the optimization of future text inputs that result in variations and alterations of the original concept (Meyer 2023, 103-104). Second, the concept expressed in the prompts may nonetheless remain concealed, since artists using AI technology to create images do not always reveal the words they used as prompts. Thus, the interpretation of the work may be at least partially influenced by the elements that AI technology generates in terms of aesthetic features of the image, even though it is still the human who has a rich semantic insight into those features. That is to say, the interpretation of a work of art might not

always be limited to the artist's intention, since it may reveal a meaning that the author themselves did not have in mind: as Nelson Goodman once wrote, the Freudian interpretations of *Hamlet* revealed a meaning of Shakespeare's play that Shakespeare himself had not thought of, although it is debatable whether Shakespeare would have agreed with or understand the psychoanalytic interpretations (Goodman and Elgin 1988, 63). Thus, AI technology can make the public and the authors themselves see in images something other than what the authors originally intended. According to a famous anecdote, Kandinsky was inspired to create abstract paintings after noticing in his studio that one of his canvases was accidentally hanging upside down. AI technology can be regarded as the exploration of various latent possibilities within predefined limits, which always make possible an element of surprise (see Anscomb 2022). From this point of view, the lack of precise human control over certain properties of the image is not an argument for separating AI-generated art from art in general, but, on the contrary, for demonstrating that this partially unpredictable process is one that suits the very nature of art itself: as R. G. Collingwood and Levinson have pointed out, even in traditional art forms, an artist is not constrained by a fixed goal in the same way as a craftsman who has to produce a utilitarian object such as a coat, a shoe or a pot: while the craftsman, in order to produce a useful object, has to stick to the plan when it comes to non-negotiable features such as shape, size, color and so on, art is a freer and open-ended process in that it is not compelled to envisage so many features, or at least can accept deviations from many of them (Levinson 2006, 36). If this is the case, then even the process of optimizing the prompts demonstrates that the process of adjusting expectations and effects, as Meyer puts it, is not a way of applying a fixed set of instructions, but of exploring through trial and error a world of latent possibilities (see Meyer 2023, 103). Of course, the surprises AI technology offers, at least at its current phase of development, do not always satisfactorily match the author's intention or expectations, and this is why, as we have already shown, the artist's control usually extends to creating variations based on the same prompt, modifying the

prompt, setting certain parameters or subsequently editing the images in Photoshop. Yet, while it is true that successful AI-generated images are the happy reconciliation between an artist's expectations and some unpredictable results, these images, as long as they are art and not mere technological miracles, are more than just a happy surprise, since they bear either directly or indirectly the hallmark of a human's style and ideas, as well as the heritage of an entire history of culture.

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Some Aspects of the fides - ratio Relationship in Saint Augustine

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Abstract

Augustine was never evident in delimiting himself in relation to philosophy (*ratio* - *Intellige ut Credas*) and theology (*fides* - *Crede ut Intelligas*). Indeed, for a while, he was a philosopher without being a theologian; then, he was a theologian without being less of a philosopher. The problem cannot be solved by distinguishing too quickly between an *Augustine philosopher (ratio)* and an *Augustine theologian (fides)*. I raise this issue because the present study could displease philosophers and theologians alike. I see the solution in that a theologian cannot talk about Saint Augustine while abstracting from Augustine, the philosopher, just as a philosopher cannot put Augustine, the theologian, in brackets. Therefore, it is not a question of “dividing” Augustine. To do so is both unphilosophical and untheological. Augustine “disseminates” himself! I want to discuss several aspects of this “distribution” in the present study. Only in this way can one understand how *ratio confortata fide*. Augustine, freed from prejudices, did not free himself from the truth.

Keywords: God, Saint Augustine, philosophy, faith, reason, catechesis, authority, revelation

1. Where does it start?

(ut gaudens qui que catechizet)

The principle of catechesis, Augustine is convinced, must be: “but as to the means by which all is to be done, so that every one may have pleasure in his work when he catechises” / *ut gaudens qui que catechizet* (Augustinus 1865a, 312; my transl.) and no care should be greater than this: “to catechize with joy that is what requires the greatest consideration” (*ea cura maxima est*) and Augustine quotes here 2 Corinthians 9, 7: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him

give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver". At this point, several preliminary Augustinian explanations are necessary: the catechesis will include a *narratio plena*, and the story's purpose is the love of God. We must not get lost in developing the causes; it is not recommended to call on abstract, tiresome terms. This way of catechizing is suitable for *rudes*. Otherwise, the initiated must be catechized discreetly because they know the truths of the faith. In their case, the catechesis must be short, not like for the common man: "not in the character of an uneducated man, as they say, but in that of one who has passed through a finished culture and training in the books of the learned" / *non idiota, ut aiunt, sed doctorum libris expolitus atque excultus accedit* (Augustinus 1865a, 319; my transl.). Augustine states that a pure heart is more valuable and desirable than a skilled tongue. The catechesis will include the exordium, the narrative, and the conclusion, and, with Augustine, *narratio* becomes the fundamental method of the catechesis. Three didactic principles are fixed, and they concern the *choice* of matter, the *arrangement* of the matter, and its *exposition*. The three principles are:

1. *non multa, sed multum*, i.e., give a little, but do it intuitively and thoroughly, "not many, but much" was an older principle of learning. The idea appears in Quintilian in *De Institutione Oratoria*: "[W]e must familiarize ourselves with the best writers only and roust form our minds and develop an appropriate tone by reading that is deep rather than wide" / *et multa magis quam multorum lectione formanda mens* (Quintilian 1922, 35). Pliny the Younger, Quintilian's disciple, emphasizes the point in *Epistle* 9, where he responds to Fuscus, who had asked him for his opinion on the study method he should follow. Pliny's advice is: "[T]hough we should read much, we should not read many books" / *enim multum legendum esse, non multa* (Pliny 1915, 21). Hence, the abbreviated form *Multa, non multum* or *Non multa, sed multum*. And the ergonomic formula becomes: "for in such matters influence is measured not by numbers but by weight" / *non numero haec judicantur, sed pondere*, in fact, a eulogy to quality (Cicero 1928, 254-255). Then Augustine follows Quintilian's precepts: the pupil should

learn Greek to study and interpret Greek literature, to comment on Latin literature, to study linguistic and mathematical problems;

2. the ultimate goal of catechesis is love precisely because the *history of discovery* is the love of God, and the *history of salvation* is the history of God's love. It follows that the story of God's love is also the central theme of catechesis;

3. learn individually, and we find the place of this imperative in that if love is the same for everyone, the cure is no longer the same for everyone.

Any catechesis implies three types of speech corresponding to three types of listening. The types of speaking are: *docere*, *delectare*, *flectere*, and the three corresponding types of listening are called by Augustine *intelligenter*, *libenter*, *oboedienter*. This is how the act of catechesis leads to faith, and Augustine speaks of a triple concomitance in the act of faith: *credere Deum* ("to believe God"), *crede Deo* ("to believe in a God"), and *crede in Deum* ("to believe in God"). In *Sermo* 126, 1, 1, after starting from the fact that *fides intellectum praecedere debet* says that "faith is a step towards understanding" / "faith is entitled to understanding; "understanding is the reward of faith" - *fides enim gradus est intellegendi; intellectus autem meritum fidei* - (Augustinus 1865b, 698; my transl.). Augustine's speeches are *cor ad cor loquitur* / "heart speaks to heart". I must say that the phrase *cor ad cor loquitur*, not always exactly in this form, has a history in four tenses. We find it first in *Psalms* 15, 2: "He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (*qui loquitur veritatem in corde suo*). Then, in the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine: *Deus meus, ne tu sileas a me. Tu loquere in corde meo veraciter* / "O my God, that Thou be not silent to me. Do Thou speak truly in my heart" (Augustinus 1841a, 834; my transl.). The phrase *cor cordi loquitur* appears in Francis de Sales – *Treatise on the Love of God* known as *Theotimus* (Francis de Sales 1884, 235). Then, in 1879, when Pope Leo XIII made John Henry Newman – a simple priest at that time, a British theologian converted to Catholicism – a cardinal, the motto adopted by the new cardinal was Francis de Sales' formula slightly modified: *cor ad cor loquitur*.

I return to Augustine after this brief and necessary parenthesis. The style of Augustinian preaching is threefold, as it appears in *De Doctrina Christiana* (Augustinus 1865c, 107; 111; 115; 115; my transl.): *submissae dictionis* (“the calm, subdued style”), *grande dicendi genus* (“the majestic style”), and *temperata dictio* (“the temperate style”). These styles correspond to the division made by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the work *On the Arrangement of Words* (*Peri syntheseos onomaton* / *De compositione verborum*): the inferior style, the middle style, and the superior style. The use of the three styles is recommended by Augustine, who argues that the expected result must be *non plausus, sed lacryma* (considering that there was a custom for the preacher to be interrupted by applause, a custom that was gradually abandoned). Again, I must state that I have not been able to find the relevant quote, which I also found in the form: *non plausus, sed lacryma et suspiria*. I found bizarre references to this occurrence that I could not identify in any way. For example, in the *Cours d’Éloquence Sacrée* (Guillon 1827, 17), a series of lectures on the bishop of Hippo, we read that the phrase under the form *non plausus sed lacrymae* is from *Sermo* 217 of Augustine. Then, in *Essai sur l’éloquence de la chaire. Panégyriques, éloges et discours*, the reference is also to *Sermo* 217 (Maury 1828, 111), and *Corso di Eloquenza sacra* (Guillon 1830, 54) specifies that *non plausus, sed lacryma et suspiria* is to be found in *Epistle* 34 of Saint Jerome. Similarly, the abbot Henry Augustin (Augustin 1834, 325) also attributes the phrase *non plausus, sed lacrymae* to Augustine without specifying the occurrence. The same situation with Jean-Baptiste Pérennès (Pérennès 1829, 428) who, in *De l’influence des évènements politiques sur la littérature, depuis 1789*, only refers to the rhetorical triumph of Augustine and then repeats the quotation, including the page, in the work *Principes de littérature mis en harmonie avec la morale chrétienne* (Pérennès 1857, 428).

I close the parenthesis and return to Augustine, in whose opinion an orator must instruct, please, and convince. Here, Augustine is influenced by Cicero, from whom he takes the rules of rhetoric and style. Augustine’s speeches and the instructions left to the preachers are valid in their entirety,

even today. I especially note the phrase: “If, however, he cannot do even this, let his life be such as shall not only secure a reward for himself, but afford an example to others; and let his manner of living be an eloquent sermon in itself” / *sit ejus quasi copia dicendi forma vivendi* (Augustinus 1865c, 119; my transl.). This is why Augustine asks the preacher to be an “orator” not a “dictor” because “he will succeed more by piety in prayer than by gifts of oratory” / “if you would speak, pray first” / *sit orator antequam dictor* (Augustinus 1865c, 103; my transl.).

The six reasons for disgust doubled by how a good mood is obtained are fundamental (“Of the Attainment of Cheerfulness in the Duty of Catechizing, and of Various Causes Producing Weariness in the Catechumen” - *Iam de hilaritate comparanda. Causae sex taedium afferentes catechizanti. Remedium contra causau taedii* (Augustinus 1865a, 320; my transl.).

Sadness appears when “our hearer does not apprehend what we mean” (*auditor non capit* - Augustinus 1865a, 15; my transl.), when our speech contains “uncertain issue” (*incerto exitu* - *ibid.*, 16), when we have to “repeatedly matters” (*repetere fastidimus* - *ibid.*, 17), “when we fail to see our hearer in any degree moved” (*cum moveri non videmus audientem* - *ibid.*, 18; my transl.), when “one who at first listened to us with all readiness, becomes exhausted” (*vel audiendo vel stando fatigatus* - *ibid.*, 19; my transl.), “either to pass by for a time or altogether to omit” (*aut intermittamus, aut omnino omittamus* - *ibid.*, 20; my transl.) and when we have a “troubled soul” (*perturbatus animus* - *ibid.*, 21). And all this following a series of correspondence with deacon Deogratias: “You have requested me, brother Deogratias, to send you in writing something which might be of service to you in the matter of catechising the uninstructed” / *Petisti me, frater Deogratias, ut aliquid ad te de cathechizandis rudibus, quod tibi usi esset, scriberem* (*ibid.*, 309; my transl.). Augustine does his duty by understanding, without mistakes in his speech, without repeating trivial things, without his listener remaining impassive (*auditor immobilis*), and without showing signs of fatigue, without being interrupted or with a disturbed soul. Augustine puts himself in the act of catechesis and delivers himself, casually and openly, to

Deogratias (deacon from Carthage and friend of Augustine), who learns from Augustine that he must avoid temptations because the devil, devoid of any power, seeks souls to perish with him. And God, merciful as He is, wants to save people from destruction. But puts a condition: “The merciful God, willing to deliver men from this destruction, that is to say, from everlasting pains, if they should not prove enemies to themselves, and if they should not withstand the mercy of their Creator” / *A quo interitu, hoc est poenis sempiternis Deus misericors volens homines liberare, si sibi ipsi non sint inimici, et non resistant misericordiae Creatoris sui* (ibid., 52; my transl.). And when you are your enemy, you oppose the Creator’s mercy. Augustine knows well what he is asserting. He does not speak from the experience of others!

2. Where does one get to?

(convictio rerum quae non videntur)

The purpose of catechesis (from the Greek verb κατέχειν: meaning “to give a sound”, “to answer”, “to echo”, “to teach orally” or “instruct by word of mouth”) is to create in the catechist the spiritual and rational availability to receive and understand the truth. *Hebrews* 11:1 writes: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” - *Et autem fides sperando rum substantia, rerum argumentum non apparentium*. Augustine relies on this idea to define the purpose of catechesis, which is faith. In *Enchiridion*, 8, he says that *fides esse dicta est convictio rerum quae non videntur* (and he quotes here *Hebrews* 11, 1), this is *catholicae Regulae defensores* (Augustinus 1865d, 235). Faith, as such, engages all the faculties of the soul, primarily reason and will. *Sermo* 63, 3, 4, one of Augustine’s most essential texts regarding the relation between reason and faith, assures us of the following aspects: *Intellige. Omnis homo vult; intelligere; nemo est qui nolit; credere non omnes volunt. Dicit mihi homo: Intellegam ut credam. Respondeo: Crede ut intelligas. Cum ergo nata inter nos sit controversia talis quodam modo, ut ille mihi dicat: Intellegam ut credam, ego ei respondeam: Immo crede, ut intelligas* (“Everybody wants to be understood; there isn’t

anybody who doesn't want to understand; not everybody wants to believe. Someone says to me: let me understand, in order to believe. I answer: believe in order to understand. So when an argument of this sort somehow starts between us, so that he says to me: let me understand in order to believe, and I answer him: on the contrary, believe in order to understand" (Augustinus 1865b, 255; my transl.). Why? Because "no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed" / *Nullus quippe credit aliquid, nisi prius cogitaverit esse credendum* (Augustinus 1865e, 963; my transl.). The progress of knowledge and faith is reciprocal.

The following idea is obvious: although no one believes in God if he does not understand something, nevertheless, by the very faith with which he thinks he is healed to understand the great things. Because there are some that if we do not understand, we do not believe, and others that if we do not believe, we do not understand! However, in the field of faith, authority is essential: "What we understand, then, we owe to reason, what we believe to authority" / *quod scimus igitur, debemus rationi; quod credimus, auctoritati* (Augustinus 1841b, 607; my transl.). The idea can be found in *De utilitate credendi*, XI, 25: "What then we understand, we owe to reason; what we believe, to authority" / *Quod intellegimus igitur, debemus rationi: quod credimus, auctoritati: quod opinamur, errori* (Augustinus 1865f, 83; my transl.).

God is the material, formal, and final object of faith. "Faith is the lowly door by which the «heart», bowing to enter, is cleansed in order that at length the whole mind may apprehend the universal abiding Truth-may see God. The faithful shall at last see God by the instrument of reason; but reason cannot attain the vision of God uncorrected and unguided by faith" (Cushman 1950, 273). *De Trinitate* reports a similar thought: "For contemplation is the recompense of faith, for which recompense our hearts are purified by faith" / *Contemplatio quippe merces est fidei, cui mercedi per fidem corda mundantur* (Augustinus 1865g, 832; my transl.). Faith leads us to certainty "not by human reasoning, but by divine authority" / *non argumentatione humana, sed divina auctoritate* (Augustinus 1865g, 1023; my transl.). From this perspective,

the *literati* who need to be catechized have to learn not to dislike the firm language of Scripture just because it is not emphatic. Augustine recalls how disappointed he was when he first tried to read the Scripture, and his case is not unique. Jerome, Arnobius, Lactantius do not say of themselves that they suffered in any other way. Let the *literati* overcome their prejudices. The excessive cult of form is a reprehensible vanity. The idea is above the word, as the soul is above the body (Marrou 1997, 381-382, 396, 414). It must be reached not only by knowledge of *res* but also by a master of *verba*. Augustine states the two sources of knowledge immediately after conversion: reason and authority. This conclusion is imposed on him since *Contra Academicos*: “But no one doubts that we are incited to learn by the double weight of authority and of reason” / *nulli autem dubium est gemino pondere nos impelli ad discendum, auctoritatis atque rationis* (Augustinus 1841c, 957; my transl.).

Chronologically, faith precedes reason. To understand something, we must first admit *credo ut intelligam*. Several times, Augustine pinpoints the primacy of faith:

- *De Ordine*: “Authority comes first in time, reason in the reality of things” / *Tempore auctoritas, re autem ratio prior est* (Augustinus 1841d, 1007);

- *De Trinitate*: “Wherefore, since we desire to understand the eternity, and equality, and unity of the Trinity, as much as is permitted us, but ought to believe before we understand” / *Quamobrem quoniam Trinitatis aeternitatem, et aequalitatem, et unitatem, quantum datur, intellegere cupimus, prius autem quam intellegamus, credere debemus* (Augustinus 1865g, 952; my transl.);

- In *Evangelium Ioannis Tractatus*, *Tractatus* 40 starts from *John* 8, 32: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” / *Et cognoscetis veritatem, et veritas liberabit vos*. Augustine says: *Quid promittit credentibus fratres? “Et cognoscetis veritatem” [...]. Credimus enim ut cognoscamus, non cognoscimus ut credamus* / “What, brethren, does He promise believers? «And you shall know the truth» [...]. They believed, not because they knew, but that they might come to know” (Augustinus 1864, 1690; my transl.).

All these passages, however, concern the intimate understanding of revealed truths. Regarding the preparation for faith, Augustine clearly marks the role of reason that precedes and accompanies the adhesion of the spirit. This is the order of the relations between reason and faith (Portalié 1931, 2337-2341). I will list several examples below.

Before faith, reason must show us not the intimate truth of the statements but the quality of the one who wants to be taken at his word. *Epistle* 120, which is a reply given in 410 to Consentius, a novice in theology who asks Augustine for clarification on the mystery of the Trinity (Saint Augustine 2003, 131; Fatal 2016, 9-11), also dwells on the relation between the status of reason in its connections with faith, authority, knowledge, and truth and, after proclaiming the principle: *cum etiam credere non possemus, nisi rationales animas haberemus* / “Heaven forbid, I say, that we should believe in such a way that we do not accept or seek a rational account, since we could not even believe if we did not have rational souls”, explains the priority of reason: *fides præcedat rationem, qua cor mundetur, ut magnæ rationis capiat et perferat lucem, hoc utique rationis est* [here is the reference to *Isaiah* 7, 9 to which I will return]. *Ubi procul dubio discevit hæc duo, deditque consilium quo prius credamus, ut id quod credimus intelligere valeamus* / “faith precedes reason so that the heart may be purified in order that it may receive and sustain the light of the great reason, which is, of course, a demand of reason! [...]. There he undoubtedly distinguished these two and gave the counsel that we should believe first in order that we may be able to understand what we believe” (Augustinus 1865h, 453; my transl.). In summary, Augustine argues as follows: God cannot hate in us what He Himself put there (reason) and made us superior to other living beings. If we have to believe, it is not to prevent us from receiving or seeking reason, since we could not believe if we did not have souls endowed with reason (Madec 2003, 237-238). In the very act of faith, reason defends the authority of testimony. Augustine point out in *De Prædestinatione Sanctorum*: *non enim omnis qui cogitate, credit; cum ideo cogitent plerique, ne credant: sed cogitat omnis qui credit, et credendo cogitat, et*

cogitando credit / “For it is not every one who thinks that believes, since many think in order that they may not believe; but everybody who believes, thinks, both thinks in believing and believes in thinking” (Augustinus 1865e, 963; my transl.). For the intimate understanding of the mystery, faith precedes reason. Once the divine testimony is known, reason stops at the edge of the mystery. Augustine summarizes his position in two formulas: *intelligam, ut credam* [...]; *crede ut intelligas* / “to understand so that you might believe, to believe so that you might understand” / “understand in order to believe, believe in order to understand” (Augustinus 1865i, 258; my transl.) and *nisi credamus, non intelligimus*. Conclusion: *intellige, ut credas verbum meum; crede, ut intelligas verbum Dei* (Augustinus 1865i, 258).

Augustine is the first, at least in the Western space, who felt the need to rationalize his faith, which is the same thing as saying that he puts it in line with reason. To understand so that you might believe, to believe so that you might understand means that I, before believing, need to establish, with the help of discursive reason, the reasons for credibility or the foundations of my belief. In the same way, once a believer, one must always exercise reason to penetrate the harmony of dogmatic truths between them or their concordance with reason. Only in this case will a believer experience the truth of Christianity. We believe in order to know, we do not know in order to believe (*credimus enim ut cognoscamus, non cognoscimus ut credamus*)! Therefore, faith precedes reason (*fides antecedit / praecedat rationem*). This does not entail any disregard for reason; Augustine considers all those who follow faith blindly to be heretics. As faith precedes reason, the latter can also precede faith without finding any contradiction herein. According to Augustine in *De Magistro*: “Hence, what I understand, that I also believe, although I do not also understand everything I believe. Also, everything I understand, I know, though I do not know everything I believe” / *Quod ergo intelligo, it etiam credo: at non omne, quod credo, etiam intelligo. Omne autem quod intelligo, scio; non omne quod credo, scio* (Augustinus 1841e, 1216; my transl.). This statement is based on *Isaiah 7:9: Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis* (“If ye will

not believe, surely ye shall not be established”); that is, it seems consistent with reason that faith precedes reason. In fact, “The Septuagint rendering of the text is of capital importance for Augustine’s teaching on the primacy of faith and on the role of reason to penetrate the meaning of revealed truth. In a letter to Consentius (*Ep.* 120), he presents a summary of the relation between faith and reason” (Augustine 1990, 50, n.2).

Augustine invokes the formula *from Isaiah* in many instances. For example, in *Epistle* 120, he writes: *Et ideo rationabiliter, dictum est per prophetam: Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis* / “Unless you believe, you will not understand” (Augustinus 1865h, 3; my transl.). Interestingly, *Sermo* 43 has the following title: *De eo quod scriptum est in Isaia: Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis*. Also, *Sermo* 43, 6, 7 (place summarized in the formula *Fides praecedat intelligetis*) reads: *Tu dicebas: Intelligam ut credam. Ego dicebam: Ut intelligas crede. Nata est controversia, veniam ad iudicem, iudicet propheta, imo verus Deus iudicet per prophetum. Ambo taceamus. Quid ambo dixerimus, auditum est. Intelligam, inquis, ut credam. Crede, inquam ut intelligas. Respondeat propheta: Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis* / “You said: I understand in order to believe. I said: I believe in order to understand. A dispute has arisen, I will go to the judge, let the prophet judge, let the true God judge through the prophet. Let’s both shut up. What we both said was heard. I understand in order to believe, you say. I believe in order to understand, I say. Let the prophet answer: Unless you believe, you will not understand” (Augustinus 1865i, 7; my transl.). And *De Doctrina Christiana* clarifies things once and for all, and here is what it highlights about the place in *Isaiah* mentioned before: *Item illud ejusdem Isaiae prophetae: Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis, alius interpretatus est: Nisi credideritis, non permanebitis* / “Likewise the words of the same prophet: Unless you believe, you will not understand; another interpretation is: If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (Augustinus 1865c, 43; my transl.; Gilson 1949, 36-46). The first reference (*Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis*) is to the LXX, the second (*Nisi credideritis, non permanebitis*) to the *Vulgate*, from which it can be seen that Augustine knew very well that there

were two different translations of this verse and three variants of it, the original version from the Masoretic Text that does not appear anywhere in Augustine (“If you will not believe, you certainly shall not last”), the version from the LXX (ἐὰν μὴ πιστεύσητε, οὐδὲ μὴ συνῆτε / *Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis* / “Unless you believe, you will not understand”) and the *Vulgate* version (*Si non credideritis, non permanebitis* / “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established”). I find the reference to *Isaiah* 7, 9 and in *De Fide et Symbolo*, I, 1 (LXX variant), in *De Libero Arbitrio*, I, 2, 4 (LXX variant); II, 2, 6 (LXX variant), in *De Trinitate*, VII, 6, 12 (LXX variant), as well as in *De Agone Christiano*, XIII, 14 (LXX variant), likewise in *De Symbolo ad Cathecumenos*, II, 2 (LXX variant). It can be noted that Augustine refers only once to the *Vulgate* version and never to the Masoretic Text. Eugen Munteanu offers a suitable comment on this somewhat obscure occurrence: “St. Augustine’s formulation, *nisi credideritis, non intelligetis*, reflects [...] the tradition of the Septuagint. The original Hebrew text contains an untranslatable word game, based on the radical ’MN, which can lead, through vocalization, to the verbs (’âman) «to support» or (’ăman) «to believe» [...]. In the BIBLE. HEBREW. The discussed verse is presented as follows: [...] - ’im lo’ tha mīynū kīy lō’ thē’ omanū. In VULG., the formula is close to the original Hebrew text (*Si non credideritis, non permanebitis*). It differs from St. Augustine’s option, which he quoted and commented in *De Doctrina Christiana*” (Munteanu 1997, 225-226).

3. Some conclusions

Faith / *fides* (*Crede ut Intelligas*) appropriates its truth by adhesion; reason/ratio (*Intellige ut Credas*) intimately realizes its truth through science. The two types of truth do not exclude but complete each other since their basis is only one – God. Moreover, rational truth is a confirmation of faith because, according to Augustine, science sometimes precedes faith, and other times follows it. *Precedes* because the truth of faith is made intelligible with the help of science concepts; *follows* because the truth of science leads to the deepening of the truth embraced by the revealed doctrine. Let no one see here two

truths, but only one. However, in the end, the essential condition for the collaboration of reason with faith lies in the primacy of faith; respecting this requirement, a Christian can make use of reason, and only, in this case, can reason make us understand what we believe. The law itself was written on stone because people had stopped reading it in their hearts, where they already had it written. Revelation guarantees the objectivity of reason, not vice versa. Faith does not demonstrate; it proposes; it does not impose; it is not demonstrative but indicative. Reason demonstrates, and in this act, it must not forget what it owes to Revelation. And reason is indicative only as far as goals are concerned, but it can no longer provide us with the means to achieve these goals. This inability becomes operative only with faith that does not give birth to pride, as reason does. Faith provides us with the truth; reason deepens it. It is clear that reason is given one of the most critical roles and, later on, in Saint Thomas, the rule of agreement between reason and faith will be: *ratio confortata fide* / “reason strengthens faith”. *De Doctrina Christiana* states the following about philosophers and philosophy: “Moreover, if those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said anything that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it” / *Philosophi autem qui vocantur, si qua forte vera et fidei nostrae accommodata dixerunt, maxime Platonici, non solum formidanda non sunt, sed ab eis etiam tanquam injustis possessoribus in usum nostrum vindicanda* (Augustinus 1865c, 63; my transl.). Augustine’s opponents are not the philosophers, but the heretics. Augustine writes to Dioscurus that if we are to investigate the doctrines that are contrary to the truth, we have to deal with heretics rather than with Anaxagoras or Democritus. To philosophize is good, but in moderation, philosophers deserve more respect than idols!

On the other hand, faith is nothing more than a thought to which one has consented. God gave us reason; therefore, He cannot hate reason in us. There is much in us that we believe without knowing, but nothing that we know without believing. Not all who think ponder, but all who believe ponder. Faith is

the foundation of human life; friendship is founded on it because the thoughts of a friend cannot be seen and yet are believed. "Although it can be said that God's commandments pertain to faith alone, if it is not a dead [faith], but rather understood as that live faith, which works through love" / *Licet recte dici pussit ad solam fidem pertinere dei mandata, si non mortua, sed viva illa intellegatur fides, quae per dilectionem operator* (Augustinus 1865j, 223; my transl.), for those who do not have love, faith is of no use, and those who love anything but the truth are mistaken. The places in the New Testament to which Augustine refers are *Jacobi* 2:20: "faith without works is dead" (*fides sine operibus mortua est*) and *Galatians* 5:6: "but faith which worketh by love" (*sed fides, quae per dilectionem / caritatem operator*).

Augustine's philosophy "develops entirely within faith, being nothing more than an effort to find through reason the truth received in the soul on the path of authority" (Marrou 1997, 155). So that "I believe in order to understand" (*credo ut intelligam*) is, for Augustinianism, an essential requirement that involves adherence (faith) and participation (reason and faith). And Augustine resumes and reinforces in *Sermo* 139 an idea from *Sermo* 126, namely that faith must precede understanding so that understanding is a reward for faith (*fides enim debet praecedere intellectum, ut sit intellectus fidei praemium*) (Augustinus 1865b, 770; my transl.). A thing cannot be loved unless it is known. Faith must be thought of and related to consent: if consent is set aside, faith is set aside because one cannot believe at all without consent. Accepting the Revelation, reason does not humble itself and ceases to search. The recognition of differences does not oppose the evidence of convergences. Faith is the requirement without which one cannot reach reason. Faith precedes because it is the first manifestation of grace in us; the first gift that we have received is the gift of faith, and Augustine is conscientious to show how his thinking on these matters evolves. Yes, the first gift received is the gift of faith, but faith, by which we believe in God, is not a gift from God, but it is in us through us - *putans fidem qua in Deum credimus, non esse donum Dei, sed a nobis esse in nobis* (Augustinus 1865e, 964). The principle is: you

have to wish now to be satisfied later! Grace gives us the will to believe, in which case it does not compel us to believe. God's action is exerted directly on the will. It leads man to faith, and this means "to think with assent", therefore *Credere nihil aliud est quam cum assensione cogitare* / "to believe is nothing else but to think with consent" (Augustinus 1865e, 963; my transl.). "Faith and reason are required one of the other. They are co-implicates; and it is error, in Augustine's view, to divorce them. Faith presupposes reason; reason urgently requires the correction of faith" (Cushman 1950, 294). Blind faith is foreign to Augustine and he, among the first, understood that authentic dialogue is not a dialogue *about something* but a dialogue *in something*. "Therefore, except a man have faith, he shall in no wise understand" (Cushman 1950, 294).

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Le mouvement de l'idée chez Malebranche. Entre l'attention humaine et la garantie divine

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Abstract

Malebranche's Movement of the Idea: Between Human Attention and Divine Guarantee

The aim of this article is to analyze the concept of attention in the work of Nicolas Malebranche and to suggest an explanation for its ambivalent status concentrated in the phrase "natural prayer". The goal is therefore to understand the relationship between the theology and the Malebranchist method and to determine the consequences generated by the definition of the idea as an external object that moves towards the mind. The mobility of the idea and the epistemological guarantee offered by the divine Word thus describe a phenomenological space that exposes occasionalism to a strong internal tension.

Keywords: Malebranche, occasionalism, idea, attention, freedom, knowledge, theology

Il n'est plus besoin de mentionner le fait que la question de l'attention chez Nicolas Malebranche a déjà fait l'objet de plusieurs études (Blanchard 1956, Peppers-Bates 2005, Nadler 2000, Dupuis 2017, Lovascio 2017)¹. Ces recherches consacrées à la méthode insistent soit sur le rôle épistémologique de l'attention et son rapport avec la méthode cartésienne (Lovascio 2017, 171-231) soit sur la relation morale entre l'attention et la liberté (Dreyfus 1958, 223 ; Adam 1995, 121)². Toutefois, comme certains exégètes l'ont récemment observé (Dupuis 2017, 60 ; Lovascio 2017)³, on ne peut s'empêcher de constater que

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Malebranche lui-même fait une analyse assez sommaire de ce concept, alors que le rôle de celui-ci dans le système est crucial.

On connaît donc le fait que, pour Malebranche, l'attention (sérieuse) ne décrit autre chose que *la* méthode : « Je n'ai point pour cela de méthode particulière. Je ne juge des choses que sur les idées qui les représentent indépendamment des choses qui me sont connues : voilà toute ma méthode. Les principes de mes connaissances se trouvent tous dans mes idées et les règles de ma conduite par rapport à la religion, dans les vérités de la foi. Toute ma méthode se réduit à une attention sérieuse à ce qui m'éclairé et à ce qui me conduit » (Malebranche 1965, 337).

Cette définition de la méthode, aussi simple qu'elle puisse paraître, cache en effet deux aspects qui mériteraient une analyse plus attentive, à savoir *le rôle représentatif de l'idée* et *le fonctionnement de l'attention*. Car, à bien regarder, la méthode malebranchiste renvoie en même temps, sans établir une hiérarchie, à deux *definiens* : l'idée représentative et l'attention sérieuse. Peut-on déceler ici une indécision de l'Oratorien, qui n'a pas pu choisir entre *deux* définitions de la méthode (les ayant cachés dans le même paragraphe, faisant mine de ne livrer qu'une seule) ou plutôt une articulation de deux aspects inséparables (épistémologique et théologique) d'une *seule* définition, plutôt conjecturée en fonction du contexte que circonscrite de manière systématique ?

Nous penchons plutôt pour la deuxième hypothèse et nous tenterons de montrer que c'est *une conception particulière du mouvement*, mise en œuvre de manière implicite, qui tient ensemble les deux dimensions, celle épistémologique et celle théologique, de la méthode malebranchiste. L'attention serait-elle un simple « moyen » (antichambre de la méthode) ou bien serait-elle l'outil « indispensable » (*la* méthode en acte) ? Il ne faut pas se presser de trancher, mais revisiter les textes malebranchistes pour bien comprendre comment l'attention fonctionne sur les deux plans, d'autant plus que « l'image de ce mécanisme reste *un peu floue* » (Dupuis 2017, 63)⁴.

Rapportons-nous à la célèbre et longue controverse entre Malebranche et Arnauld sur la nature des idées pour comprendre le fonctionnement de l'attention : « Le mouvement par lequel l'esprit s'approche des idées particulières ou plutôt la

cause occasionnelle de la présence des idées, c'est l'attention », écrit Malebranche dans la *Réponse aux vraies et fausses idées* (Malebranche 1966b, 127).

Sous la pression d'Arnauld, Malebranche se voit obligé d'expliquer ce qu'il entend par « présence de l'idée » ; il la définit grâce au concept d'attention, à savoir « le mouvement par lequel l'esprit s'approche des idées particulières ». On ne saurait sous-estimer le rôle que joue ici le concept de mouvement (en tant que rapprochement entre l'esprit et l'idée), car il y a plusieurs autres fragments malebranchistes (notamment dans le *Premier Éclaircissement*) qui renforcent cette définition de la présence des idées en tant que *proximité* (Malebranche 2006c, 19)⁵. Pour l'oratorien, l'idée, qui est originellement éloignée (puisque'elle est placée en Dieu), s'approche (se « présente ») de l'esprit, et devient « immédiate », au point de le « toucher » et de le « modifier » : « Par idée, je n'entends ici autre chose que ce qui est l'objet immédiat, où le plus proche de l'esprit, quand il aperçoit une chose, c'est-à-dire ce qui touche et modifie l'esprit de la perception qu'il a d'un objet » (Malebranche 2006a, 413). L'idée est donc soumise à un processus de réduction de la distance qui la sépare de l'esprit : « [j'ai dit] que je pouvais désirer, pour ainsi dire, de voir *de près* ce que je ne vois que *de loin* » (Malebranche 1966b, 127)⁶. Le processus de passage de la confusion à la clarté dans la connaissance de l'idée est ici explicitement décrit comme le passage de la vue « de loin » à la vue « de près », ce qui ne saurait avoir lieu, disons-le encore une fois, que si *l'idée éloignée se rapprochait de l'âme*.

Cette thèse est une constante de l'épistémologie de l'Oratorien dès le *Premier Éclaircissement* jusqu'à la dernière œuvre, *Réflexions sur la prémotion physique*, qui décrit l'attention comme l'élément qui déclenche et qui entretient *le mouvement de l'idée* : « On ne peut se rendre attentif qu'aux choses dont on a déjà quelque connaissance ou quelque sentiment confus. Car l'attention à un objet ou à son idée suppose l'objet où son idée et en conséquence de l'attention, l'idée de l'objet s'approche pour ainsi dire de l'esprit et l'affecte d'une modification ou d'une perception d'autant plus vive et plus claire que l'attention est plus forte » (Malebranche 1958, 49).

La méthode ne consisterait alors qu'à *éveiller* et à maintenir l'attention *vive* (ou *sérieuse*), afin que celle-ci rende les idées obscures de plus en plus claires, c'est-à-dire de plus en plus *proches* de l'âme. L'idée s'avère donc « mobile » sous l'emprise de l'attention, même si son lieu originnaire se trouve « en Dieu ».

Maintenant, s'il fallait analyser le présupposé de fond de l'épistémologie malebranchiste, on pourrait remarquer qu'il est constitué par la thèse d'une distance phénoménologique fondamentale entre l'idée et l'âme (Henry 1963, 75)⁷. Puisque les objets que l'homme doit connaître se trouvent dans une extériorité originnaire et que l'âme ne peut pas « sortir du corps pour se promener dans les cieux » (Malebranche 2006a, 413), il faut que l'idée (placée en Dieu) se mette en mouvement et se présente à l'esprit, afin que celui-ci puisse connaître les objets. L'esprit ne possède pas comme un « magasin » (2006a, 429) les idées qui lui sont nécessaires pour voir les objets, donc il doit les déplacer du lieu originnaire où celles-ci se trouvent (c'est-à-dire *en Dieu*), jusque dans sa proximité. Le mouvement de l'idée (à l'opposé de sensations et des passions, qui sont intérieures à l'âme et qui ne doivent pas se soumettre à ce *requisit*⁸), rend possible la définition de la représentation comme « présence » de l'idée à l'esprit.

Il y va donc dans l'épistémologie malebranchiste d'un model phénoménologique qui se fonde sur un *dynamisme de l'idée* au sens très propre du terme. L'idée est *mobile* et son mouvement possède une *direction* bien précise, à savoir de la substance divine infinie vers l'esprit humain fini. Toutefois, cela ne va pas sans soulever une question importante, à savoir la manière dont l'attention réussit à mouvoir l'idée. Qu'est-ce qui confère à l'attention cette capacité d'assurer un *rapprochement* et même un *contact* entre l'idée et l'esprit (Blanchard 1956, 23)⁹ ? Comment l'homme peut-il déterminer l'idée placée en Dieu à se mouvoir vers son esprit fini ?

Ici, on quitte la dimension épistémologique et on avance sur un plan théologique. Car, pour expliquer comment l'attention réussit à imprimer à l'idée un mouvement, Malebranche est obligé d'introduire, dans le *Premier Eclaircissement*, une « loi de la nature » qui garantit que l'attention produise des effets immédiats : « C'est une loi de la nature que les idées des objets se

présentent à notre esprit dès que nous voulons y penser [...]. S'il est donc vrai que nous pouvons vouloir considérer de près ce que nous voyons déjà comme de loin... les idées s'approchent de nous dès que nous le voulons » (Malebranche 2006c, 19). Cette loi de la nature ne doit pas faire croire que c'est l'attention en elle-même qui est efficace, mais plutôt que l'attention, en tant qu'*effort*, est la condition nécessaire pour que l'homme reçoive de Dieu la présence de l'idée.

Pourtant, il ne faudrait pas se méprendre sur les mots, car l'homme, qui n'est que « ténèbres à lui-même » (Malebranche 1959, 19) et ne peut pas causer par lui-même le mouvement de l'idée. C'est Dieu, cause efficace, qui le fait¹⁰. Le désir de la connaissance, qui éveille et maintient l'attention vive, n'est que la cause occasionnelle de la présence des idées. C'est donc ici que Malebranche lui-même réalise l'articulation de l'épistémologie et de la théologie, définissant l'attention comme « prière naturelle »¹¹ adressée à la Raison universelle. L'attention est une prière « naturelle » parce qu'elle ne cherche pas l'union mystique à Dieu : son rôle est d'obtenir uniquement la connaissance claire des idées. Dans la *XIIIe Méditation chrétienne*, le Verbe cautionne cette dimension purement épistémologique de l'attention¹², ainsi que la différence entre la prière naturelle et la prière proprement théologique ou l'invocation de Dieu¹³.

En même temps, l'attention est une « prière » parce que l'homme demande à Dieu de lui octroyer la présence de ces idées, ne pouvant pas les connaître « là où elles sont » (dans la substance divine) et ne pouvant pas le présentifier tout seul. On comprend donc que l'attention en tant que méthode est doublement déterminée (épistémologiquement, elle explique le rapprochement entre l'idée et l'esprit ; théologiquement, elle garantit que ce rapprochement est octroyé par Dieu lui-même, à l'occasion de l'attention de l'esprit). Le manque de précisions méthodologiques¹⁴ dont parlent les exégètes malebranchistes récents est dû à cette construction à *double versant* et au changement souvent inattendu de registre. Selon Blanchard (1956, 41), dans le syntagme « prière naturelle », il faudrait y reconnaître une *définition analogique* : « l'attention est à la possession de la vérité ce que la prière est à l'obtention de la

grâce » dont le fond réside dans « la ressemblance phénoménologique de ces deux attitudes de l'âme ».

Or, tout en reconnaissant le fonctionnement « analogique » de l'attention en tant que prière naturelle, nous devons souligner aussi une limite de cette articulation entre l'épistémologie et la théologie malebranchiste. Il est vrai que l'Oratorien avertit, dans les *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques*, qu'une personne qui ne sait pas que la présence des idées est accordée par Dieu *en conséquence de l'attention* pourrait croire que celle-ci est la vraie cause la présence des idées, vu la simultanéité entre l'exercice de la volonté et l'apparition de l'idée à l'esprit : « Dès que tu veux penser à quelque objet, l'idée de cet objet se présente à ton esprit » (Malebranche 1959, 12). Le désir ou l'attention n'est la cause *occasionnelle* (et non réelle) de la présence des idées qu'en vertu des volontés efficaces de Dieu.

Néanmoins, une question ne manque de surgir : la volonté de Dieu est toujours déterminée par l'attention de l'homme ? Dans la *Xe Méditation*, le Verbe dit au disciple que la prière naturelle est « *toujours exaucée* » lorsque certaines conditions sont remplies, à savoir lorsque l'homme s'adresse à Dieu avec « tout le respect et toute l'application nécessaire » (Malebranche 1959, 27). Le Verbe se réserve donc le droit de ne pas répondre à cette prière naturelle si elle n'est pas faite « avec attention et sans persévérance » (Malebranche 1959, 28) et si elle se propose d'atteindre des vérités qui ne sont pas nécessaires ou utiles à l'homme (la *IIIe Méditation* établit ce que le disciple peut ou ne peut pas demander au Verbe)¹⁵. La condition minimale requise pour que le disciple reçoive ce qu'il désire est de prêter une attention *constante, sérieuse, respectueuse*, au Verbe (des termes synonymes, en fin de compte)¹⁶.

Toutefois, malgré ces conditions suspensives, la *Xe Méditation* admet qu'il existe un cas particulier où les volontés de l'homme déterminent *toujours* l'action efficace de Dieu, qui accorde *immédiatement* la connaissance des idées : « « l'attention de l'esprit est une prière naturelle, qui obtient immédiatement de Dieu la lumière et l'intelligence des vérités les plus révélées » (Malebranche 1959, 144).

Il n'est donc plus question de conditions *théologiques* suspensives lorsque l'attention agit, sur le plan *épistémologique*, en tant que cause occasionnelle de la présence des idées.

Puisque la présence des idées à l'esprit de l'homme ne comporte aucune condition suspensive, on peut affirmer que le mouvement de l'idée vers l'esprit est quasi-garanti, sinon *obligatoire*. Le mot était déjà avancé par Malebranche lui-même, dans la *IIIe Méditation chrétienne* (le Verbe y assure que les souhaits ou les désirs de l'homme « obligent » Dieu à répondre¹⁷), mais son audace était en partie masquée par l'utilisation des conditions suspensives. Dans la *XIIIe Méditation*, ces conditions seront oubliées ; l'attention, en tant que cause occasionnelle de la présence des idées, atteint toujours sa visée, puisque Dieu lui-même *s'oblige à rendre présentes les idées à l'esprit humain*.

D'ailleurs, le disciple, dans la *IIIe Méditation*, ne voulait autre chose qu'apprendre comment « obliger » Dieu à répondre : « ...pourvu que je sache bien vous interroger pour vous *obliger* à me répondre. Je vous prie donc de m'apprendre quelle est cette manière de vous consulter, qui est *toujours* récompensée d'une connaissance claire et évidente de la vérité » (Malebranche 1959, 30). On ne saurait suffisamment souligner l'irrévérence de ce désir de pouvoir « obliger » Dieu¹⁸.

Nous reprenons donc la question que nous avons soulevée plus tôt : qu'est-ce qui confère à l'attention cette capacité d'imprimer un mouvement invincible à l'idée et qui garantit que l'attention atteigne toujours sa visée épistémologique ? En règle générale, par l'attention « toutes les vérités se découvrent et toutes les sciences s'apprennent » (Malebranche 2006a, 17) ; l'attention impose donc une obligation d'effort et de rectitude du vouloir¹⁹ ainsi qu'une difficile mais nécessaire ignorance des plaisirs sensibles²⁰.

Toutefois, l'élément original que la *XIIIe Méditation* introduit consiste dans usage bien particulier de l'attention, à savoir l'obtention *sans conditions* de la présence des idées. Dès lors, on peut regarder de plus près le mécanisme général de l'attention pour se demander si, *dans ce cas particulier* (la présence des idées à l'esprit), Malebranche lui-même ne met pas en danger la distinction entre la cause occasionnelle et la cause réelle.

Certes, l'attention peut encore être tenue pour cause *occasionnelle* de la présence des idées et Dieu peut encore garder le statut de cause *réelle*, mais lorsque la cause réelle *s'oblige* à *toujours* exaucer la prière naturelle qu'est l'attention et à mouvoir *immédiatement* l'idée vers l'esprit, la cause occasionnelle (l'attention) ne se comporte-t-elle pas comme une cause réelle, rendant ainsi la distinction purement lexicale ? Lorsque Dieu *s'oblige* à octroyer la présence des idées à l'esprit, ne peut-on pas soutenir que la cause occasionnelle assume subrepticement (dans une seule situation, mais bien réelle) le même pouvoir que la cause efficace ?

Bien évidemment, on sait que dans le *XVe Éclaircissement*, Malebranche fournit plusieurs preuves contre la prétendue puissance des causes secondes, mais l'attention à l'idée n'est pas affectée par aucune de ces preuves. Au sujet précis de la présence des idées, le fonctionnement de l'attention suppose une *quasi*-efficace de la cause occasionnelle, du moment que Dieu *s'oblige* à déplacer l'idée (phénoménologiquement parlant) jusque dans la proximité de l'esprit, *comme si la volonté divine était soumise à celle de l'homme*.

Or, il se trouve que cette expression apparaît au moins trois fois sous la plume de Malebranche pour décrire l'état ante-lapsaire d'Adam : « Ainsi la volonté de Dieu ou la loi générale de la nature, qui est la cause véritable de la communication des mouvements, *dépendait en certaines occasions* de la volonté d'Adam. Car Dieu avait cet égard pour lui, qu'il ne produisait point, s'il [Adam] n'y consentait, de nouveaux mouvements dans son corps propre, ou pour le moins dans la partie qui en est la principale, et à laquelle l'âme est immédiatement unie » (Malebranche 1959, 35)²¹. La formule, même adoucie par Malebranche (« en certaines occasions »), est très radicale dans sa visée : dans l'état ante-lapsaire, la volonté de Dieu *dépendait* de la volonté d'Adam.

Elle sera reprise à la lettre dans le *VIIIe Éclaircissement*, et d'une manière plus radicale, puisque cette fois-ci, elle décrira non pas l'Adam innocent, mais...l'homme pécheur : « L'homme, quoique pécheur, a le pouvoir de remuer et d'arrêter son bras, lorsqu'il lui plaît. Donc, selon les différentes volontés de l'homme, les esprits animaux sont déterminés pour produire ou pour

arrêter quelques mouvements dans le corps, ce que certainement ne peut se faire par la loi de la communication des mouvements. *Ainsi la volonté de Dieu étant encore aujourd'hui*, s'il est permis de parler ainsi, *soumise à la nôtre*, pourquoi n'aurait-elle pas été soumise à celle d'Adam ? » (Malebranche 2006c, 97-98).

L'intuition que l'état innocent d'Adam et notre état pécheur sont identiques (Alquié 1974) semble donc bien fondée, d'autant plus que l'élément qu'ils ont en commun (le mécanisme de l'attention) peut échapper aux conséquences du péché originel, gardant son statut adamique même dans l'état actuel de l'homme²². La *XIIIe Méditation* le confirme : « Adam était donc, en tout sens parfaitement libre. Il était maître de son attention [...] Mais l'homme n'est plus dans le même état. *Ses désirs, il est vrai, sont encore aujourd'hui cause occasionnelle de la présence des idées* ; mais il n'est plus toujours le maître de ses désirs » (Malebranche 1959, 145).

Nous pensons donc pouvoir éclaircir, enfin, le mécanisme « un peu flou » du fonctionnement de l'attention, sur son versant épistémologique. Lorsqu'il s'agit de l'attention comme *effort général* de l'esprit, on peut dire que celle-ci est difficile et qu'elle requiert un effort continu et un détournement des sens, le péché empêchant son bon fonctionnement (Malebranche 1959, 140).

Mais lorsqu'il s'agit de l'attention comme *visée des idées* (pour leur imprimer un mouvement vers l'esprit), le versant théologique se trouve, en quelque sorte, « naturalisé » et les conséquences théologiques du péché originel ne sont plus prises en compte. C'est bien dans ce sens que nous devons comprendre « l'obligation » du Verbe à « toujours exaucer » la prière naturelle et à accorder « immédiatement » ce que l'attention désire.

Or, pour réussir à garantir l'efficace de l'attention en tant que méthode, Malebranche se voit obligé d'aménager une brèche dans sa théorie de la causalité et d'imaginer un état exceptionnel (commun à Adam et à l'homme actuel) dans lequel la cause occasionnelle détermine *invinciblement* les effets produits par la cause efficace, sans que celle-ci puisse se dérober au mécanisme de présentification des idées. Qui plus est, le Verbe consent à ne pas enfreindre cet état exceptionnel : « Tu penses à ce que tu veux ; tes volontés sont *souvent* exaucées. Qu'elles le soient même *toujours* à l'égard de la présence des idées, *j'y consens*. En

un mot, je veux que tes désirs soient les causes occasionnelles, ou naturelles de tes connaissances » (Malebranche 1959, 144).

Deux observations en guise de conclusions nous permettent de clore cet article qui n'a pas la prétention d'épuiser le problème de l'attention chez Malebranche.

La première concerne la théologie malebranchiste. Si, comme bien l'a fait remarquer Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin, « l'Être suprême semble donc en quelque sorte déterminé par les causes secondes, qui font servir sa puissance au bien comme au mal [...] L'occasionalisme malmène l'autonomie de Dieu », et qu'ainsi se vérifie « la thèse d'un comportement « déontologique » du Dieu malebranchiste » (Pellegrin 2006, 197, 198), alors on peut soutenir que la théologie paie un prix très lourd pour que la dimension épistémologique de l'attention puisse s'exercer sans faille, garantissant le mouvement de l'idée vers l'esprit. Le Verbe s'oblige, dans la *XIIIe Méditation*, de ne pas entraver la présence des idées à l'esprit, qui doit être *immédiate* (comme l'était pour Adam avant le péché). Dieu a beau être la seule cause efficace ; dans ce cas précis de la connaissance des idées, *la cause occasionnelle endosse le rôle de cause efficace et rend celle-ci superflue*.

La deuxième conclusion concerne l'occasionalisme malebranchiste et ses conséquences. Si on accepte que les désirs humains sont dits causes occasionnelles ou « naturelles » des connaissances, il n'y qu'un seul pas à franchir pour soutenir que l'attention de l'esprit « produit *naturellement* la lumière » (Malebranche 1959, 168). Des lors, si l'attention peut court-circuiter la cause efficace divine (même dans un *seul* cas, mais un seul cas suffit pour prouver que cette hypothèse est envisageable), pourquoi ne ferait-elle de même dans *tous les cas* ? L'attention se transformerait ainsi de *méthode* en simple *fonction* de l'entendement, sans faire encore appel à une causalité divine garantissant la connaissance des idées : « Apercevoir ou avoir conscience, *donner son attention*, reconnaître, imaginer, se ressouvenir, réfléchir, distinguer ses idées, les abstraire, les comparer, les composer, les décomposer, les analyser, affirmer, nier, juger, raisonner, concevoir : voilà l'entendement » (Condillac 2016, 121). Sur ce point, on peut se demander si Condillac n'a fait qu'exploiter à fond la brèche ouverte par Malebranche lui-

même comme *exception dans l'occasionalisme* pour « naturaliser » l'attention, afin de *garantir* l'accès aux idées situés en Dieu. Trop de garanties (divines) finissent par rendre l'attention purement naturelle (humaine).

NOTES

¹ De l'ouvrage de Pierre Blanchard (1956), qui reste une référence incontournable jusqu'aux thèses plus récentes (Lovascio, 2017), la méthode malebranchiste continue de susciter l'intérêt des chercheurs. On consultera aussi, avec profit, d'autres ouvrages consacrés à l'attention dans l'œuvre de Malebranche comme Nadler 2000, Lennon 2000, Peppers-Bates 2005, Dupuis 2017.

² « L'attention manifeste ainsi la liberté d'une double façon. En un sens, elle a sa racine dans un pouvoir d'indifférence, qui s'exprime dans le non comme dans le oui, dans la concentration comme dans le relâchement de l'entendement. [...] Le libre refus de l'attention, c'est la libre décision de la volonté de se faire esclave des passions » (Dreyfus 1958, 223) ; « Malebranche situe ainsi l'attention au centre de sa réflexion morale. Par elle, on peut atteindre au vrai bonheur » (Adam 1995, 121).

³ A ces affirmations sur une certaine indétermination malebranchiste dans la description de la méthode s'ajoutent celles tout aussi pertinentes de Tania Lovascio: « Come ho sottolineato altre volte, Malebranche non definisce mai il suo metodo e ciò che più si avvicina ad una definizione è il passo introduttivo del VI libro, in cui sono indicati gli obiettivi fondamentali di quest'ultimo e la sua divisione in due parti [...] Dunque, allo stato dei fatti, non solo del metodo non è data una definizione, ma del termine stesso non si trova neppure alcuna menzione, nel luogo in cui Malebranche descrive, in termini fin troppo sintetici, il nucleo dell'ultimo libro. Il punto è che, invece, sembra trattarsi di una questione di metodo – dato che Malebranche si serve di quest'espressione – per quel che attiene all'errore » (Lovascio 2017, 225-226). Retenons encore la juste observation de Tania Lovascio sur le *double rôle de la méthode* (épistémologique et théologique) : « Il fine di tale metodo resta quello di condurre l'uomo alla scoperta della verità e questa volta è esplicita anche la ragione dell'interesse alla verità, ovvero l'unione con Dio » (Lovascio 2017, 238). La vérité (de l'idée) n'est, en fin de compte qu'une étape vers l'union (à Dieu), les *deux* aspects devraient, en fin de compte, être vus comme appartenant à une démarche *unitaire*.

⁴ « Chez Malebranche, de manière générale, l'attention n'est pas analysée dans le même détail que l'imagination à laquelle le philosophe consacre de longs et systématiques développements ; quelques déterminations éparses et répétées semblent suffire, comme si l'idée courante de l'attention, quoiqu'elle soit inscrite dans l'héritage cartésien, était intégrée dans ce qui fut, pour un temps, la « méthode » malebranchiste énoncée comme telle. L'attention, outil indispensable mais simple moyen d'atteindre ce qui

compte vraiment, laisse la préséance à ce qu'elle vise et que la pensée doit déterminer métaphysiquement : la vérité théorique et la perfection morale » (Dupuis 2017, 63).

⁵ « C'est une loi de la nature que les idées des objets *se présentent* à notre esprit dès que nous voulons y penser [...]. S'il est donc vrai que nous pouvons vouloir considérer de près ce que nous voyons déjà comme de loin... *les idées s'approchent de nous* dès que nous le voulons... » (Malebranche 2006c, 19). Et encore, dans le *Ile Eclaircissement* : « Or le désir de l'âme est une prière naturelle qui est toujours exaucée, car c'est une loi naturelle que les idées soient d'autant plus présentes à l'esprit, que la volonté les désiré avec plus d'ardeur » (Malebranche 2006c, 39). Contre cette relation entre ardeur du désir (de l'attention) et clarté de l'idée, Antoine Arnauld remarquera, sèchement, que « cela serait beau, s'il serait vrai » et ironisera, grâce un exemple, cette thèse malebranchiste : « Je ne sais que confusément ce que c'est qu'un parabole ; j'ai beau désirer d'en avoir une idée plus claire et plus distincte, qui m'en puisse faire connaître les propriétés ; je suis assuré que si je ne fais que le désirer, avec quelque ardeur que le je désire, je n'éprouverait ce qu'on me dit avec tant de confiance... » (Arnauld 1964, t.38, 270).

⁶ L'opposition entre voir « de loin » – voir « de près » (employée parfois avec un « comme » qui adoucit une position trop audacieuse) n'est pas accidentelle chez Malebranche, on la retrouve encore dans d'autres textes : « S'il est donc vrai que nous pouvons vouloir considérer *de près* ce que nous voyons déjà comme *de loin*... *les idées s'approchent de nous* dès que nous le voulons... » (Malebranche 2006c, 19) ; « Certainement vous ne pouvez pas vouloir penser à un cercle, si vous n'en avez déjà l'idée, ou du moins l'idée de l'étendue dont vous puissiez considérer certaines parties sans penser aux autres. Vous ne pouvez les voir *de près*, le voir distinctement si vous ne le voyez déjà confusément et *comme de loin* » (Malebranche 1965, 44).

⁷ Pour une analyse plus détaillée sur la « distance phénoméno-logique », nous renvoyons à l'ouvrage classique de Michel Henry (1963, 75) ainsi qu'à ses analyses sur le rejet par Malebranche de l'immédiateté cartésienne du *videre videor* dans Henry (1985, 84). Nous avons exploité les considérations de Michel Henry en analysant la dimension *ek-statique* de l'idée malebranchiste et ses présuppositions phénoménologiques fondamentales dans Moisuc 2015. Nous reprenons ici l'acquis de ces pages qui prouvent que la doctrine malebranchiste des idées est régie par le présupposé phénoménologique de l'*ek-stasis* et que toute la querelle avec Arnauld concernant le statut de l'idée en tant qu'*être représentatif* (superflu ou imaginaire, selon Arnauld ; réel et extérieur à l'âme, selon Malebranche) est dû à une modification opérée par Malebranche dans la notion cartésienne de réalité objective de l'idée : « L'immédiateté cartésienne de l'auto-affection du *cogito* devient chez Malebranche la proximité spatiale de l'idée qui touche ou modifie l'âme. Ainsi, l'éloignement et la proximité de l'idée (comme être réel et extérieur à l'âme) décrivent le mécanisme de la connaissance malebranchiste » - (Moisuc 2015, 110).

⁸ « Il est certain que l'âme voit dans elle-même et sans idées, toutes les sensations et les passions dont elle est actuellement touchée... parce que les

sensations et les passions de l'âme ne représentent rien qui soit hors d'elle » (Malebranche 2006a, 433).

⁹ « Le premier effet de l'attention est de réunir le sujet et l'objet de la connaissance. L'âme s'approche

de l'objet, l'idée de l'objet s'approche pour ainsi dire de l'esprit et l'affecte d'une modification et d'une perception d'autant plus vive et plus claire que l'attention est plus forte. De confus qu'il était, l'objet est rendu plus distinct... La distraction provoque l'effet inverse. Elle éloigné l'objet sans l'anéantir. Bref, l'attention est la présence de l'esprit à l'objet et de l'objet à l'esprit » (Blanchard 1956, 23).

¹⁰ « J'ai prétendu seulement dire que l'âme qui veut considérer avec attention cet objet s'approche par son attention et son désir, parce que ce désir, en conséquence des volontés efficaces de Dieu, qui sont les lois inviolables de la nature, est la cause de la présence et de la clarté de l'idée qui représente cet objet » (Malebranche 2006c, 40).

¹¹ « L'attention est une prière naturelle, que l'esprit me fait comme à la Raison universelle, afin qu'il reçoive de moi la lumière de l'intelligence et j'exauce toujours cette prière, lors qu'elle à certaines conditions que je t'ai expliquées auparavant » (Malebranche 1959, 30). On trouvera une liste de 17 occurrences textuelles où l'Oratorien définit l'attention comme *prière naturelle* dans Blanchard (1956, 38-41). Dans ces pages classiques, Blanchard retrace la genèse et l'histoire de cette « brillante expression » (41) ou de cette « trouvaille » (42). En tant que définition de l'attention, cette expression apparaît pour la première fois dans les conclusions du livre VI du second volume de *Recherche* (Malebranche 2006b, 453).

¹² « L'attention de l'esprit est une prière naturelle, qui obtient immédiatement de Dieu la lumière et l'intelligence des vérités les plus révélées, sans qu'il soit nécessaire que je m'en mêle en qualité de Médiateur, d'Auteur de la grâce, de Chef de l'Église » (Malebranche 1959, 144).

¹³ « Il faut qu'il me prie par son attention, qui est la prière naturelle, aussi bien que par l'invocation, qui est la prière de la foi et de la grâce [...] Il faut, dis-je, qu'il me prie en toutes les manières qui me sont possibles » (Malebranche 1959, 148).

¹⁴ Pierre Blanchard avait déjà essayé en 1956 de mettre un peu d'ordre dans le vocabulaire que Malebranche utilise pour décrire l'attention, établissant une liste sur laquelle figurent plusieurs synonymes comme « application de l'esprit », « réflexion », « méditation » et même un possible schéma graduel de l'acquisition de la vérité : « *Attention* : aux objets, aux idées. *Réflexion* : au sujet. *Méditation* » (Blanchard 1956, 24-27). Selon Blanchard, l'attention est « un premier contact avec la vérité » (27), donc la première étape d'une démarche plus longue.

¹⁵ Par exemple, si l'homme demande « sans persévérance », le Verbe répond « si bas », que l'homme « n'entendra pas clairement » la réponse (Malebranche 1959, 30) ; si l'homme forme un désir « vain et inutile » ou « dérégulé » de découvrir « le rapport de la diagonale d'un carré à sa racine », il ne recevra pas de réponse ; s'il veut savoir « ce que pense son ennemi, le succès que doit avoir une affaire où quelque secret de la nature », le Verbe n'en répondra pas (Malebranche 1959, 31). Comme règle générale, le Verbe

avertit le disciple qu'il ne faut pas lui demander « les événements futurs et plusieurs autres vérités qui dépendent de la volonté de Dieu » (Malebranche 1959, 31), puisqu'Il est la Sagesse qui ne contient en Lui que des vérités *éternelles*, et non pas des vérités *contingentes*.

¹⁶ « Or, l'attention de l'esprit ne manque jamais d'être récompensée par la vue de la vérité, autant qu'elle le peut être, pourvu qu'elle soit *constante et sérieuse* » (Malebranche 1959, 146) ; « Car, lorsque mes disciples rentrent en eux-mêmes et me consultent *avec tout le respect et toute l'application nécessaire*, je découvre à leur esprit avec évidence plusieurs vérités qu'ils savaient seulement avec certitude à cause de l'infailibilité de ma parole » (Malebranche 1959, 28).

¹⁷ « Ne te souviens-tu pas que je t'ai répondu souvent dès que tu l'as désiré ? Tes souhaits suffisent donc pour *m'obliger* à te répondre. Il est vrai que je veux être prié, avant que de répandre mes grâces » (Malebranche 1959, 30) ; « Voici ce que je me suis *obligé* de te donner, si tu me le demandes avec assez d'attention et de persévérance » (Malebranche 1959, 32). Le disciple apprend, avec surprise, de la part du Verbe lui-même, que « vous promettez de me découvrir avec évidence beaucoup de vérités de foi, pourvu que je sache bien vous *interroger* pour vous *obliger* à répondre » (Malebranche 1959, 30). Cette relation entre le disciple et le Verbe divin ressemble plutôt à un interrogatoire sous contrôle judiciaire qu'à une prière théologique.

¹⁸ Malebranche ira jusqu'à attribuer au Verbe la phrase suivante: « Tes souhaits suffisent donc pour m'obliger à te répondre » (Malebranche 1959, 30). Cela suscitera l'observation sarcastique d'Arnauld: « Et enfin il fait prononcer tout cela comme des oracles à la Sagesse éternelle, dans ses *Méditations* » (Arnauld 1964, t. 39, 445).

¹⁹ « Notre attention dépend de nos volontés, mais elle dépend beaucoup plus de nos sentiments et de nos passions. Il faut faire de grands efforts pour ne pas regarder ce qui frappe, pour ne pas aimer ce qui plaît, et l'âme ne se laisse jamais plutôt, que lorsqu'elle combat contre les plaisirs et qu'elle se rend en un sens totalement malheureuse » (Malebranche 1966a, 122-123).

²⁰ « Tout plaisir excite et détermine le mouvement naturel de l'âme ; et comme en tout temps on veut être heureux, le mouvement libre de la volonté se conforme volontiers à ce mouvement libre qu'excitent les sens. Il faut résister pour ne pas suivre ce mouvement » (Malebranche 1966b, 132).

²¹ In existe encore une occurrence sous une forme légèrement différente, mais non moins radicale: « Dès que tu penses à quelque objet, l'idée de cet objet se présente à ton esprit, mais c'est peut être une faveur que tu dois reconnaître d'autant plus volontiers qu'elle t'est plus promptement accordée: c'est peut être que les volontés de Dieu, qui sont immuables et toujours efficaces, *s'accordent avec les tiennes*, en qu'en cela elles font ce que tu veux, et que tu penses faire » (Malebranche 1959, 12). L'accord des volontés se fait toujours en faveur de la volonté humaine, puisque la volonté divine produit les effets que la volonté humaine veut obtenir (la présence des idées).

²² « ...il semble que Malebranche ne reconnaisse plus, entre l'état adamique et le nôtre, grande différence. Ce que savait Adam, nous pouvons le découvrir par philosophie : comme le sien, notre esprit demeure uni au

Verbe. Adam pouvait se porter vers la vérité par cette attention qui est une prière naturelle : nous le pouvons aussi » (Alquié 1974, 466). Selon une autre belle formule ironique d'Alquié : « Adam était malebranchiste avant l'heure » (Alquié 1974, 464).

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Veille et état d'exception

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Abstract Watchfulness and State of Exception

This article intends to link watchfulness to the state of exception. Ordinarily, both concepts do not have any close connection, since watchfulness belongs to the field of metaphysics, and the state of exception to the field of political study. Nevertheless, thanks to authors such as Agamben (who, in *Il Timp che chesta*, develops a theological frame of the state of exception) we can include the first concept with the other one. Thus, we discover that the „sleeping state” corresponds to the „as if state” in biopolitics. From there, watchfulness adopts and dialectically embraces the posture of the Paulinian „as if not” and facilitates the overcoming of nihilism, which is inherent in societies of surveillance which always coerces Man’s power of acting towards the Origin.

Keywords: watchfulness, biopolitics, exception, Agamben, Boutang

« Veille devant la page irriguée par une encre rouge. La moindre distraction, au-dehors comme au-dedans, provoquerait le tumulte des pierres et l’assèchement de la vie »

(Bobin 2022, 557)

1. Introduction

Quel rapport entre veille et état d'exception ? Le premier terme est un concept métaphysique, le deuxième terme est un concept politique. La veille, dans le christianisme, est l’attente du Messie ; l’état d’exception, d’un point de vue politique, est la suspension du droit commun, dans les situations d’état d’urgence, par exemple.

Pourtant, le concept d'état d'exception est également théologico-politique, et a été analysé par Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt et Giorgio Agamben, entre autres. Les études sur l'état d'exception sont nombreuses, surtout dans le domaine politique, mais aucune ne la relie à la veille. Notre intérêt concernant la liaison entre veille et état d'exception naît d'une relecture du *Temps qui reste* d'Agamben (2004), en compagnie de l'herméneutique de la veille en arrière-plan. En effet, de ce point de vue, comment ne pas souder l'*eschaton* à l'attente du Messie ? Ainsi, cet article étaye une des réflexions issues de notre ouvrage *Sur le sentier de la veille* (2023), selon la problématique cherchant à trouver l'accomplissement de la personne au sein des sociétés de surveillance nées vers la fin de ce que l'on nomme communément Moyen-Age¹.

Notre thèse stipule que la veille est l'exception de l'exception au sein de « l'état d'exception devenue la règle » ; pour cela, il serait judicieux de revenir aux fondements de la veille, situés avant le scandale de la Croix, que l'on retrouve chez Héraclite, selon lequel la veille est déjà un état d'exception par rapport aux dormeurs : ainsi, la norme serait celle du « non éveillé », à relier à l'état du « comme si » inhérent à la biopolitique. Dès lors, le veilleur, faisant exception au « comme si », adopterait la posture du « comme pas » paulinien, laquelle correspondrait à l'exception de l'exception. Il y aurait, dans le *hos mè*, une dialectique existentielle à mettre en place *hic et nunc*.

Pour prouver notre thèse, nous analyserons les définitions de la veille à l'aide Pierre Boutang et Gabriel Marcel avant de la lier à la notion de biopolitique pour finir sur le rapport entre veilleur et temps, et plus particulièrement en confrontant le temps messianique agambénien à l'expérience du temps éontique boutangien, d'inspiration thomiste, une confrontation qui interroge la place du chrétien dans la société. Ainsi, nous suivrons une réflexion graduée, laquelle n'oubliera jamais la dialectique existentielle, pro-tendue, mais en direction de l'origine, en marge de la norme-exception juridique.

1. « Comme si » et veilles

Qu'est-ce que la veille ? La veille ne doit pas être confondue ni avec l'attention, ni avec la vigilance, ni avec la

surveillance. Nous avons déjà balisé l'ensemble des définitions et distinctions dans l'introduction de notre ouvrage (Mercier 2023) ; pour résumer ce qui constitue une problématique densément travaillée en amont, la veille se distingue des trois autres termes car elle en ajoute une dimension transcendante à la réunion de l'attention (disposition intérieure) et de la vigilance (ouverture extérieure), elle englobe la surveillance, laquelle impose une domination verticale d'homme à homme. Boutang, dans *l'Ontologie du secret*, aborde la veille autrement : elle est prise dans une dyade avec le sommeil. Qu'est-ce qu'une dyade ? A la différence de l'opposition (qui ne saurait réunir) ou de la polarité (qui est un couple stable), la dyade décrit deux termes opposés susceptibles de se réunir dans l'instant, *to exaiphnes*, telle la dyade primordiale de la vie et de la mort, laquelle commande et ordonne toutes les autres, comme le chante Jan Kochanowski dans son poème « au sommeil » (Jelenski 1981, 54) :

*« Tu enseignes la mort humaine, ô pur sommeil !
Tu nous donnes le goût futur de ce qui veille,
Endors pour un moment la cendre de nos corps,
Pour que l'âme s'envole en son grand vaisseau d'or. »*

L'Homme n'est pas éveillé de la même façon, dit Boutang, et les « degrés de la veille » varient d'un instant un autre, soit tout le contraire de la Société de surveillance où chaque homme devrait être éveillé d'un même degré, selon la régulation des excitants et des tranquillisants.

En outre, Boutang garde la dimension transcendante de la veille. Ainsi :

« Ni la veille, ni l'éveil, moins encore le réveil, n'ont, en français, un sens pleinement positif ; le premier mot se rapporte à demain, à l'endemain ; il porte une marque chrétienne, dépendant, selon nous, de la transformation subie par la *vigilia* latine, demeurée attente, certes, de la bonne heure du jour, mais associée, pour la sensibilité évangélique, au moment où Marie-Madelaine constate que Christ est ressuscité. Et ce matin (*mane venit*) au contraire, est comme un rêve, où Marie peut se méprendre, croire que là n'est pas le divin maître, mais le jardinier. – Quant à l'éveil, à s'éveiller, ils semblent indiquer la venue hors d'un fond qui pré-existe. Semblent... mais il est établi que l'*expergiscor* latin, comme en grec *εγερω*, nous parle d'une bifurcation d'un mouvement à partir d'une voie droite, d'une continuité sans histoire. L'origine du mot "veille" est donc oubliée, inversée même, puisque *vigilia* se rattache à *vigere*, d'abord

purement positif et faisant illusion à la force de la vie, comme notre “vigueur” » (Boutang 2016, 285).

Dans ce paragraphe se concentre tout aussi bien la théorie de la veille que la fin de *l'Ontologie du secret* de Boutang. La *Vigilia* est « attente » (de Dieu) par la résurrection (du Fils) comme « un rêve » (la dimension du songe est comprise dans la veille) conduisant à une bifurcation d'un mouvement à partir d'une voie droite (l'obliquité de l'âme chez pseudo-Denys) qui confère à la substance rationnelle de l'homme quelque espèce de vigueur sous les yeux du témoin (la myrophore). Or, dans nos sociétés occidentales léthargiques, l'homme de la surveillance, l'homme du ressentiment, manque justement de vigueur, de courage, d'humilité. Pour Boutang le passage à la modernité est le passage de la veille à la surveillance. Ainsi, écrit-il, « le monde chrétien, et d'autres anciens mondes, étaient plein d'anges veillant ains ; le nôtre, déchristianisé, est encombré de surveillants » (*Ibid.*, 286). La surveillance est donc liée au nihilisme, où règne l'homme du ressentiment, dominant autrui dans une immanence dépourvue de transcendance. En revanche, la veille comprend la dimension transcendante, et, de là, instaure une réalité double, l'une selon la raison et la loi, l'autre selon le cœur et l'intuition ; les deux plans coexistent dans une nouvelle immanence.

Dans le monde de l'immanence première, les différents totalitarismes essayent « d'endormir » l'homme, moins selon les lois du cœur que selon la science arraisonnée des décisions, laquelle est une déviance du Gestell². L'homme sans veille, c'est donc l'homme endormi, endormi à soi, au cosmos, à l'autre et à Dieu. C'est pourquoi la philosophie d'un chrétien comme Gabriel Marcel, l'un des maîtres philosophiques de Boutang, tente de trouver des solutions aux mécanismes qui empêchent de réveiller l'homme :

« C'est, je pense, le mot veilleur qui caractérise le plus exactement ce rôle et voici ce que je serais porté à entendre par là : veiller, cela veut d'abord dire rester éveillé, mais plus précisément encore, lutter contre le sommeil d'abord pour son propre compte. Mais de quel sommeil s'agit-il ? Il peut se présenter sous diverses formes. Il y a d'abord l'indifférence, le sentiment que je ne peux rien, c'est-à-dire le fatalisme qui peut d'ailleurs affecter lui-même des aspects divers dont l'optimisme bien commode de ceux qui pensent que tout finira par

s'arranger (comme si l'événement n'avait pas infligé à une confiance de cette sorte le plus accablant démenti!). Il y aussi la distraction volontaire de celui qui ne lit pas les journaux ou qui n'écoute pas la radio, sous prétexte que tout le monde ment. Se tenir éveillé, c'est réagir activement contre tout ce qui nous porte à adopter ces attitudes lâches ou paresseuses. Il y a donc bien une vertu de vigilance que le philosophe se doit de pratiquer dans la mesure du possible. Mais celle-ci doit, je pense, s'exercer contre toute propagande et surtout contre celle à laquelle se livrent presque inlassablement les pouvoirs publics, même dans les pays qui ne sont pas en dictature» (Gabriel Marcel 1992, 50).

Marcel, ici, n'opère pas une distinction claire entre vigilance, veille et éveil. Dans *homo viator*, il écrit : «il me semble que chacun de nous, dans une part considérable de sa vie ou de son être, est encore inéveillé, c'est-à-dire qu'il évolue en marge du réel, comme un être en proie au somnambulisme» (Marcel 1945, 27). Retenons que pour Marcel l'homme endormi, c'est l'homme qui n'agit pas, autrement dit l'homme qui manque de vigueur. Ainsi, ici, le «comme si» est afférent à une vie songeuse, oublieuse d'elle-même, dépourvue de son partenaire dyadique, la veille.

Depuis Marcel, peu de choses ont changé, étant donné que la Société du spectacle n'a jamais autant essayé d'endormir l'homme jusque dans le cauchemar. L'apocalypse de saint Jean est répétée sous formes de parodies dans les mass media, lesquels bavardent, au sens heideggérien, sur la fin des temps, sans l'anticiper, ni la comprendre. La réflexion marcellienne, quand même bien elle essaierait de réveiller un être de l'homme, en avant de l'étant qu'il est, rejoint, faut-il le souligner, la prétention philosophique de l'homme «éveillé». Rappelons que pour Héraclite, l'homme du commun est endormi, et ne peut posséder le Logos ; pour Plotin, l'homme du commun vit une expérience «hyptonique» ; pour Spinoza encore, celui qui vit dans le premier genre de connaissance se trouve dans un état quasi-hallucinatoire. L'expérience du «comme si» serait-elle universelle, viendrait-elle du fond des âges, ne serait-ce là, au fond, que la prétention de tout philosophe à vouloir être éveillé, à «snober» le commun des mortels ? Mais, la veille, depuis le Nouveau Testament, est toute autre : elle se fonde sur une attention accrue et indéterminée (par exemple, faire des tours de garde, comme un jardinier attentif autour du palmier de son

jardin pour prévenir les attaques de Paysandisia Archon), et la met en analogie avec l'attente du Fils de l'homme. A l'éveil, le fait de s'éveiller, ce qu'ajoute la veille chrétienne, c'est « l'attente du Messie, veille réitérée avec la parousie, la nouvelle venue, et rejouée au quotidien dans la veillée des morts, ou encore, exemplairement, dans la « veille » /« veillée » de Noël" (Depraz, 2013). Et c'est ainsi que le veilleur peut-être n'importe qui, à condition que « n'importe qui »³ ne fasse pas « n'importe quoi » dans une veillée graduée, jusqu'à l'ultime éveil, retombant, d'un instant à un autre, en un sommeil profond, qu'il prenne garde à ce qui peut contraindre, ou nuire, en un sens spinoziste, sa puissance. Ce pourquoi nous invitons le lecteur à relire le passage de Marcel ci-dessus. Comme conclusion partielle, la veillée chrétienne ne peut se déprendre d'un changement intérieur de la conscience transformant le rapport intime temporel entre étant et être. Il serait donc judicieux de relier l'exigence marcellienne à la méditation transcendantale de facture husserlienne.

Quoiqu'il en soit, et dans une optique cette fois-ci debordienne (situationniste), l'état du « comme si », avant toute prétention chrétienne, a été repérée par la revue Tiqqun, qu'Agamben a lue :

« Toutes les situations où nous nous trouvons engagés portent dans leur équivalence le sceau infiniment répété d'un irrévocable "comme si". Nous collaborons au maintien d'une "société" comme si nous n'en étions pas, nous concevons le monde comme si nous n'y occupions pas nous-mêmes une situation déterminée, et continuons de vieillir comme si nous devions toujours rester jeunes. D'un mot : nous vivons comme si nous étions déjà morts » (Tiqqun 2000, 28)⁴.

Soit tout l'inverse des principes pauliniens, où celui qui vit dans la posture du « comme pas » transcende vers la mort, mais au sein d'une vie toujours gardée, sauvegardée, et, ce faisant, renouvelée. En somme, plutôt que de vivre « comme si nous étions déjà morts », il serait question de retrouver une vraie vie, une forme de vie, quand bien même « je » transcende vers la mort. Nous avons donc démontré que le sujet, dans la société de surveillance, vit dans la posture du « comme si » et que la voie chrétienne pourrait apporter une réponse. De la revue Tiqqun nous pouvons en venir à Agamben : si pour les situationnismes, le paradigme de la société est la mobilisation continuelle, dans

notre vocabulaire, une participation à une réalité sectaire, séparée de Dieu, cette mobilisation diffuse n'est valable que si l'humain surveillé est désormais parqué dans des camps, c'est-à-dire « un espace qui s'ouvre lorsque l'état d'exception devient la règle » se refermant dans une « inclusion prise dans l'exclusion » - la séparation sectaire – comme le soutient Agamben (Agamben 2022, 50)⁵. Il convient de faire le parallèle entre les sociétés de surveillance et la biopolitique. Et dès lors, de renverser l'inclusion prise dans l'exclusion en excluant l'inclusion dans le « comme pas ».

2. De la veille au biopouvoir

Aux définitions précédentes, et afin de lier la veille au biopouvoir, il convient de rajouter le commentaire d'Agamben sur Aristote à propos de la veille, *theoria*, elle-même prise dans la dyade avec le sommeil :

« Le sommeil est aussi, chez Aristote, le paradigme par excellence de la puissance et de l'*hexis* et, en ce sens, il est opposé et subordonné à l'usage, assimilé, quant à lui, de la veille : "l'existence du sommeil et de la veille, implique celle de l'âme ; mais la veille est semblable au savoir en acte, le sommeil à un état sans actualisation". L'infériorité du sommeil, en tant que figure de la puissance, par rapport à l'*ενεργεια* est affirmée encore plus nettement dans les œuvres éthiques ; "que le bonheur soit une *ενεργεια*, on le voit à ceci : si un homme passe sa vie à dormir, nous refusons de le déclarer heureux. Il possède en effet la vie, mais non la vie selon ses vertus" » (Agamben 2016, 1075).

La veille chemine donc vers l'acte pur. On peut également s'appuyer sur Gaillard (2002, 285) :

« l'épistémè ne préserve qu'en puissance les étants dont la nature est de ne s'actualiser qu'avec leur matière – c'est-à-dire comme ce qui peut ne plus être – dans la particularité du ceci qui lui advient » ; ce qui nous conduit à la source aristotélicienne « L'existence du sommeil et de la veille implique celle de l'âme : mais la veille est semblable au savoir en acte, le sommeil à un état sans actualisation ».⁶

La distinction est assez claire entre ce qui est « en acte » et ce qui est « sans acte ». Mais cette puissance de l'acte doit se concevoir avec quelque espèce de retour vers le Principe. La puissance de l'acte doit agir vers la perfection ; chez les Pères Spirituels, il est question du retour vers l'état adamique

(Guillaumont, 235). C'est ainsi que nous avons expliqué, dans notre ouvrage :

« Définir la veille comme état d'exception, c'est mettre en jeu la polarité de la contemplation et de l'action (...) *Ἐνεργεῖα*, c'est donc un mouvement susceptible de retourner au divin sans être en puissance. Toutefois Boutang se sert de la veille dans une optique différente de celle d'Agamben, ce dernier revisitant la relation étroite entre *δυναμὶς* et *χρεὶς* dans une perspective politique, alors que Boutang se sert d'Aristote aux détours de *ἐντελεχία* et du *το τι ἦν εἶναι* afin de trouver la singularité d'un « je » dans la perception [...] N'oublions pas non plus qu'Aristote effectue la distinction entre sommeil et veille afin de savoir quel est le meilleur genre de vie. L'Homme est un composé, de l'âme, vous, forme ou acte premier du corps, et son *ἐντελεχία* n'est pas condamné à se perdre *κατ'οὐσίαν*. Il existe « comme une immortalisation » en filigrane de la théorie où « l'Homme ne vivra plus selon son humanité, mais selon quelque appartenance divine ». Il est donc question de mesure, et dans une perspective chrétienne la mesure devient celle du Christ » (Mercier 2023, 112).

Ainsi, la *theoria* grecque est améliorée par Urs Von Balthazar (1996, 182) de cette façon : « l'acte de la *theoria*, de la vision du Fils et, à plus forte raison, de la contemplation incessante de ce qui a été vu une fois, est vécu par le croyant lui-même comme l'unité d'un don et d'une décision ». Ceci relève du libre-arbitre chrétien, que nous relions à la puissance spinoziste. La veille chemine vers l'acte pur, avons-nous dit. Son sentier est celui de l'homo viator. Mais son sentier est semé d'embûches : car voici les affres de la biopolitique se dressant à l'horizon.

La vie « en acte » est donc semblable au *conatus* spinoziste ; en quelque sorte, la forme de vie agambénienne est à chercher dans les livres IV et V de l'*Éthique*. Agamben réconcilierait donc l'éthique spinoziste à la posture paulinienne au sein du biopouvoir. Rappelons les réflexions sur le biopouvoir de la part d'Agamben. Le biopouvoir plonge au cœur de la structure noético-esthétique de la personne même, et extraie sa « vie nu », *zoè*, en la rendant « sujet » du pouvoir. C'est la fameuse altération du *bios* et du *zoè*, dénaturant ce que nous nommons « polarité du *bios* et du *zoè* ». De nombreuses analyses de la biopolitique sur Giorgio Agamben ont été effectuée, et il nous semble peu utile, ici, de les paraphraser, sinon de les référencer en bibliographie. D'après nos recherches, Alain Gignac est celui qui a le mieux résumé et problématisé le

passage de l'analyse du biopouvoir à l'état d'exception via le temps messianique. Délivrons, succinctement, la définition du *zoè* et du *bios* :

« Les Grecs distinguaient la vie naturelle (*zoè*), commune aux vivants et confinée au domaine privé (*oïkos* domestique), de la vie qualifiée, « la vie bonne », (*bios*), commune à un groupe et concernant le domaine public (la polis). Le bios humain se différenciait de la *zoè* avant tout par le langage – par la prise de parole délibérative et éthique. Or, la modernité opère un tournant : la préoccupation politique n'est plus le bios mais la *zoè* qui, en quittant la sphère du privé, altère la sphère publique. Du même coup, on passe du politique (l'organisation de la vie commune) à l'économique (la loi de l'*oïkos* étendue à la sphère publique), en somme, *bios* et *zoè* se trouvent toutes deux dénaturées et le citoyen est réduit à n'être qu'une vie nue » – qui n'est plus ni la *zoè* ni le *bios* ! Paradoxalement, la vie naturelle, en devenant l'objet du politique, perd son caractère sacré et tue le politique » (Gignac 2013, 17-18).

Nous irons jusqu'au bout de la réflexion agambénienne : nous tuerons également le politique, même si, en dernière instance, nous réfléchissons sur une issue politique. Concernant la polarité du *bios* et du *zoè*, une fois cette altération produite, qui détruit par-delà même toute bios, toute *zoè*, l'âme humaine pâtie, au sens spinoziste, dans les structures du pouvoir. Au sens de Gabriel Marcel, le sujet devient « objet ». Dans les sociétés biopolitiques, le « toi » devient un « lui ». Lorsque « toi » devient un « lui », l'homme devient objet du savoir, il est « surveillé ». Agamben et Marcel se rejoignent donc sur l'enjeu de l'exception de l'exception : retrouver une forme de vie, une vie heureuse sur le plan éthique. Face à l'état d'exception, il serait nécessaire de retrouver un « véritable état d'exception », mais il convient de se demander si ce nouvel état d'exception, via la communauté des veilleurs, accélère ou non la fin des temps face au retardement de l'avenue du messie inhérent au « faux » état d'exception. En effet, si le veilleur est un contemplateur en action, il doit faire un choix éthique – une décision en vertu du libre-arbitre en compagnie de la visée de la grâce ; et donc, accélérer la fin des temps, *hic et nunc stans*⁷, en vue de la résurrection des corps glorieux – ces corps dont il reste « quelque chose d'éternel » selon la formule de Spinoza dans la proposition XXV de l'*Ethique*. En effet, à la fin des temps, il n'y aura plus esclave, ni maître, ni, enfin, identité, mais il restera la singularité même, d'essence-existence positive

et maîtresse de son désir. Ce serait donc une communauté de pleine puissance.

Chez Spinoza, telle communauté prendrait part à l'éternité. Ainsi, cette forme de vie ne saurait se déprendre d'une théorie afférente à la temporalité : comment relier ce sentiment d'éternité à la posture du *comme pas* ?

3. La temporalité dans la posture du « *comme pas* »

Pour ce faire, la posture du « *comme pas* » paulinien doit être relu, premièrement, à la lettre, comme le fait Agamben (2004, 259-260) :

« Seulement, que chacun marche selon la condition que le Seigneur lui a donnée en partage, et dans laquelle Dieu l'a appelé. C'est là ce que j'ordonne dans toutes les Eglises. Quelqu'un a-t-il été appelé étant circoncis ? Qu'il demeure circoncis. Quelqu'un a-t-il été appelé étant incirconcis ? Qu'il ne se fasse pas circoncire. Etre circoncis n'est rien ; et être incirconcis n'est rien ; mais l'observation des commandements de Dieu est tout. Que chacun demeure dans la vocation dans laquelle il a été appelé. As-tu été appelé étant esclave ? ne t'en mets point en peine (mais aussi, si tu peux devenir libre, profites-en) ; car l'esclave qui a été appelé dans le Seigneur est un affranchi du Seigneur ; de même aussi celui qui a été appelé étant libre, est l'esclave de Christ. Vous avez été achetés à grand prix ; ne devenez point esclaves des hommes. Frères, que chacun demeure devant Dieu dans l'état dans lequel il a été appelé » (trad. Annotée Neuchâtel)⁸.

La posture du « *comme pas* », laquelle progresse du donné au donnant, commande de ne pas changer sa nature, son identité mais, via l'identité, de se désapproprier de toute identité. Ainsi :

« Si les hommes, au lieu de chercher encore une identité propre dans la forme désormais impropre et insensée de l'individualité, parvenaient à adhérer à cette impropriété comme telle, à faire de leur propre être ainsi non pas une identité, mais une singularité commune et absolument exposée, si, autrement dit, les hommes pouvaient ne pas être ainsi, dans telle ou telle biographique particulière, mais être seulement *le* ainsi, leur extériorité singulière et leur visage, alors l'humanité accèderait pour la première fois à une communauté sans présupposés et sans objet (Agamben, 1990) ».

L'être « *ainsi* », c'est la kénose du sujet, via laquelle il devient une « *personne* », en réponse à la kénose du Toi absolu ou « *kénose de l'Un* » qui est « *tel quel* », « *ainsi* » via le *vōv*. Or cette kénose n'est possible que dans l'instant, το ἔξαιφνης, qui

échappe, en une exception temporelle, à la linéarité, en instaurant ensuite une nouvelle continuité, une nouvelle temporalité. Dans cette exception temporelle, l'être ainsi de l'Un ou du Toi coïncide avec l'être « tel quel » de l'homme. La posture du « comme pas » paulinien a été non seulement repris dans Agamben dans *Le temps qui reste*, mais aussi par Boutang tout au long de son œuvre. Il interroge directement la place du chrétien dans la société : comment peut-on vivre dans la posture du « comme pas » au sein du biopouvoir ? Comme faire advenir l'*eschaton* dans l'image-temps ? Voilà une grave question en hémenéutique religieuse. De manière audacieuse, en reliant Agamben et le « second Boutang », la posture du « comme pas » dans les sociétés de surveillance peut être reliée à la libération du Désir. La question est : qu'a-t-on oublié dans le passage de la veille à la surveillance ? Ce serait la participation archétypale à l'éternité, que l'on retrouve de l'Orient chrétien au soufisme perse.

En effet, il n'est pas question de vivre en marge de la société, même si cela demeure possible, mais au sein de la société du « comme si », en se libérant, en libérant son désir via une structure transcendantale autre⁹. Il s'agit, comme le fait remarquer Romain Deblüe, dans une conférence sur *Apocalypse du Désir* de Boutang, de « rendre à nouveau l'homme à l'homme visible, en sa condition d'image de Dieu, c'est-à-dire en sa condition de personne – et de personne désirant Dieu ». Ainsi, ajoute-t-il, « Ni désir enfermé dans l'homme, ni désir enfermant l'homme. La voie de Boutang a pour destination de précisément rendre à l'homme son désir, réalité fondamentale de sa nature, mais lui appartenant, s'accomplissant toujours, dit-il, dans une appropriation par la personne de son désir propre, et cela dans l'instant – qui est un abysse – de l'acte accompli librement qui est celui de la décision » (Deblüe 2023).

On ne retrouve ni plus ni moins le conatus spinoziste (devenir « cause de soi », devenir « cause efficiente », en accord avec la substance) mais avec le Christ en toile de fond. Car, rappelons-le, ce que reproche Boutang à des penseurs comme Spinoza (qui a vu la cause efficiente dans le troisième genre de connaissance) ou à Husserl (qui a dépeint le présent vivant et le maintenant originel de façon remarquable), c'est d'avoir dressé

une connaissance, pour le premier, sans *Sum qui sum* et, pour le second, un paulinisme « sans Christ ». Mais on peut se demander, ici, s'il est question du temps messianique. C'est en effet l'option choisie par Agamben. Sans échapper à ce monde-ci, le veilleur vit dans un monde séculier, mais placé sous une « tension messianique » venant forcer la contradiction entre tous les temps. Pour Agamben, cela signifie un reste, où le veilleur est « séparé », mis à part. Or, séparé, c'est *secerno*, en latin, et qui a donné le mot français « secret ». La tension messianique s'instaurerait, ainsi, dans l'expérience du secret. Car le temps séparé, le temps du secret, correspond à l'expérience de l'éternité, mais en retrait, réservé. Et ce temps séparé, ce temps qui reste, est également l'objet de Boutang dans *Ontologie du secret*. D'une certaine manière on pourrait dire que là où s'arrête *Le temps qui reste* d'Agamben commence *l'Ontologie du secret* de Boutang, qui interroge l'être dans le secret, et le secret dans l'étant humain en son être-ainsi, jusqu'à son assez-d'être, et ce dans un espace réservé, mis à part, mais se donnant après-coup « au milieu de », dans la foule, par exemple. Boutang ne concevait pas la veille en dehors de la modernité (car la modernité nous rattrape toujours, même au fin fond du Sinaï) mais en-dedans de la modernité, de façon à agir au sein des structures du pouvoir. *L'Ontologie du secret* est d'ores et déjà placée sous une tension messianique dès le liminaire à travers laquelle le sujet se confronte à un processus d'individuation¹⁰.

Nonobstant, tant s'en faut de parler de messianisme chez Boutang, et il est probable que Boutang essaye de trouver une voie de sortie à ce qu'on appelle d'ordinaire « messianisme »¹¹. Pourtant, il y a de grandes ressemblances entre l'issue temporelle chez Boutang via l'*ævum* thomiste, et le temps qui reste d'Agamben ; il est en effet question d'une histoire, qu'elle fût individuelle ou collective, effleurant l'éternité. Nous avons grandement abordé ce sujet à la fin de notre ouvrage *Sur le sentier de la veille* : il est question du mouvement oblique du corps par l'âme, mixe, *aitia*, de l'*apeiron*, située sur la linéarité horizontale, et du *péras*, contigu à la circularité divine. La coulée oblique rejoint le temps de la frontière agambénienne, à savoir la frontière entre « le temps humain » et le « temps » éternité. Il

serait donc de bon aloi de faire remarquer que Boutang dessine ce temps qui reste plus de trente ans avant Agamben¹².

Pour comprendre cette séparation secrète, il faut à tout prix la distinguer du temps séparé dans lequel l'homme du ressentiment se trouve de prime abord et le plus souvent : car dans la Société du Spectacle, l'homme est avant tout séparé de lui-même, du cosmos et d'autrui. Mais il est alors question d'une séparation manifeste, non secrète, encore – c'est la séparation d'avec Dieu. Via cette séparation manifeste, l'homme se fait exception à lui-même (tout le monde veut être une « exception » et se revendiquer comme telle, c'est tout le contraire du paulinisme laquelle clame de demeurer dans sa propre identité toute en la dépassant, hors de tous modèles). Par un incroyable retournement de situation dialectique, il se pourrait bien que le veilleur soit le plus normal des hommes, être « quelconque » et « multiple » sur fond de l'Un, ce qui constitue, selon notre dialectique existentielle, l'exception de l'exception, le *hos mè*. C'est seulement alors que l'homme normal, le veilleur commun, sera en mesure de revendiquer et instaurer une société où chacun se ressemble par ce quoi il diffère. Car avant d'être esclave, immigré ou handicapé, je suis avant tout un homme, le seul être sachant qu'il va mourir bien longtemps à l'avance, et qui dès lors transcende vers tel horizon, mais dans une vie intensive, jamais plus « vouée à la mort » à travers une conservation sans principe, ni fin, orientée vers un avenir sans mémoire ; ce qu'ajoute le paulinisme, c'est que cette transcendance « en marche » tourne son regard, de temps à autre, en arrière, vers le commandement de Dieu et qui transfère, dès lors, la mémoire – la tradition au sens de Benjamin – en la personne en avant de l'être qu'elle est. Par conséquent, nous préférons le terme « paulinisme » à « messianisme » pour éviter toute ambiguïté.

Le temps éontique est donc le temps du veilleur au sein du « passage » à la frontière de tous les temps ; si la modalité de ce temps est d'abord personnelle, elle ne peut se penser sans l'autre. Ainsi du point de vue éthique, la contraction messianique, ce « temps qui reste », devient « éthique qui reste », où le « lui » redevient un « toi » dans une « sorte de bonheur ivre, illuminé, produisant un moi sans frontière et sans contenu [...]

faisant jaillir une nécessité de moi et de tous les autres, hors de toute raison et de toute qualité ou sans essence » (Boutang 2016, 70).

4. Traductions sur le plan politique : singularité ou universalité ?

Après avoir réfléchi à la question du temps, serait-il question de trouver une « singularité anarchique », ou de trouver sa place dans une communauté ? Ne peut-on par réunir dialectiquement cette singularité à une communauté plurielle ?

Il y a donc plusieurs traductions possibles sur le plan politique :

a) Soit se retirer du monde, à l'image de la première tentative de Durtal dans *En route* de Huysmans. C'est le temps de l'ascèse, de la prière intensive. On peut imaginer des petites communautés retirées hors du monde, mais cela ne sied pas à notre problématique, laquelle cherche à insérer le veilleur dans le monde séculier. L'ascétique est davantage relié à une autre veille, à la *trezvie* orthodoxe, davantage focalisée sur la kénose intérieure.

b) Soit considérer, comme le fait Agamben, une communauté anarchique singulière. Puisqu'il à la fin des temps, il n'y aura ni esclave, ni maître, ni roi, ni femmes, ni hommes, mais l'être du désir, singulier, non générique, alors il est nécessaire d'instaurer une communauté ici et maintenant imitant ce qu'il y aura à la fin des temps. Toutefois, cette communauté anarchique, bien qu'elle ressemble à la destitution, ou à l'usurpation de l'identité post-moderne, s'en distingue, puisque chacun doit demeurer dans sa condition. Prenons un cas pratique : les diagnostics des personnes situées dans le segment des « neurodivergences » (ou « atypiques ») sont en augmentation en France, et certains troubles, tels que le Syndrome Asperger, ou encore le TDAH sont en augmentation. Or, de nombreux « neuroatypiques » font des vidéos YouTube en revendiquant leur différence, sans toutefois proposer des solutions. En résumé, il y a une tendance à persévérer dans sa condition = « je suis x » tout en restant x, et à l'exclusion de tous les autres (neuro-atypiques contre neurotypiques¹³) alors que si on pense avec saint Paul, il faudrait plutôt assumer sa condition différente de tout en la

dépassant, à savoir vivre en neuroatypiques comme étant « non neuroatypique », ce qui ne signifie nullement être « typique » ou « neurotypique » ; non, il serait question d'aller au-delà de l'essence. « Je est un autre », comme le dit Rimbaud, mais à condition d'être un « Nous », sans se substituer à l'Autre. Autrement, l'écueil, ici, c'est de faire usage de ses attributs tout en se laissant prendre aux jeux du pouvoir enfermant l'inclusion dans l'exclusion¹⁴. Mais en se tenant au-dehors de toute prise du pouvoir, une véritable communauté « inclusive » pourrait se penser et s'instaurer. Dans l'*eschaton*, tout le monde est *concerné*. Or, elle est déjà effective dans certaines communautés, comme dans les villages arméniens, qui intègrent l'ensemble des neuro-divergences au sein d'une communauté donnée (le village éternel de Lucian Blaga), mais à l'exclusion de toutes les autres. Il y a donc un paradoxe dans la pensée d'Agamben, c'est que les communautés anarchiques ne peuvent être universelles ; localement, toutefois, elles renverraient à l'Un via la multiplicité organique des communautés.

c) Soit considérer, en compagnie de Marcel et de Boutang, une monarchie de l'intersubjectivité, laquelle ne peut se fonder que sur le Toi absolu, et comprenant toutes les singularités liées à la terre, l'humus, lequel renverrait in fine au Ciel¹⁵. Au ciel comme sur la Terre. Boutang s'est parfois fait le plaisir de dire que la Monarchie, c'est anarchie + Un. On conserve donc l'anarchie des singularités d'Agamben, mais sur fond de l'Un, à la limite de la transcendance. Ajoutons que la singularité boutangienne est toujours lié à la terre, *humus*, et, qu'en ce sens, elle n'est pas anarchique (au sens postmoderne, à savoir être un individu sans possession)¹⁶. En y rajoutant « intersubjectif », nous conservons ainsi le concept de Toi absolu marcellien. Cette « monarchie intersubjective » est liée à la monarchie intérieure, la monarchie des veilleurs, laquelle a déjà été étudiée¹⁷. Cette communauté extérieure de la monarchie intérieure, nous l'appelons communauté de ceux qui vivent dans le quatrième genre de connaissance¹⁸.

A première vue, et pour essayer de trancher, ce qui manquerait chez Agamben, c'est l'idée d'origine réunie au projet de l'avenir que l'on retrouve chez Boutang et qui se fonde dans le maintenant originel de Husserl¹⁹. Pourtant, la contraction de la

protention divine et de la rétention phénoménologique fondant un *nunc stans* se retrouve également chez Benjamin et Agamben à l'origine d'un progrès singulier, dans un maintenant (*ho nun kairos*) institué et reconstitué évinçant toute espèce de nostalgie mais, de même, toute attrait au devenir réactionnaire. Boutang avait pourtant prévu la présente objection, lui qui place dans sa problématique dans un maintenant échappant à la veine nostalgie, ainsi qu'à l'illusoire utopie... Ainsi, le temps opératif d'Agamben, qui permet à l'individu chrétien de se transformer radicalement, est le temps du veilleur dans une parousie renouvelée qui n'oublie pas, in fine, la place du futur²⁰.

Si pour un chercheur comme Alain Gignac la solution agambénienne semble être la plus satisfaisante et la plus complexe, nous avançons comme argument que bien à l'avance, la solution boutangienne ne revêt pas moins d'importance, et est d'autant plus complexe qu'elle demeure en partie inexplorée. Le temps éontique est le temps du veilleur, dans l'attente de Dieu, mais la veille n'est pas qu'attente de quelque chose d'inattendu survienne, comme surgissant de nulle part. Car le Christ serait paradoxalement « déjà-là » disposé dans la libération de l'homme intérieur. C'est ce que nous appelons « protention divine ». Être ouvert et disposé au couloir oblique de l'*aeivum* thomiste ne peut se déprendre de la veille-sur-soi comme Cogito-Fils au sein du mystère ontologie et du secret ontique, ni de la veille analogique au sein de l'exception, ni, encore moins, de la veille intersubjective, qui préserve le « toi » d'être un lui, et le sujet d'un objet. Non, notre veilleur de lumière sait d'avance que ce temps qui reste est ce temps qui lui reste pour éveiller autrui à l'*aeivum*, le libérer des sciences de la décision emprisonnant son désir, pour dès lors instaurer une communauté de singularités vivant en Christ. C'est seulement alors que nous triompherons du nihilisme au sein du *Gestell* ou du « monde cassé » marcellien, ou, en d'autres termes, que nous vivrons le véritable état d'exception au sein, non en marge, du fallacieux état d'exception.

Ainsi, il reste à savoir si le veilleur peut véritablement transformer le monde à la manière de Marcel, c'est-à-dire instaurer une Paix terrestre en compagnie de l'amour comme cause transcendante ; ou bien s'il faut repenser toute espèce de violence fondatrice et symbolique venant briser souterrainement

les institutions en place. L'option de l'Eglise-Institution semble actionner en « sous-terrain », mais sans violence fondatrice ; le veilleur, de son côté, en vertu de son appartenance à l'Eglise universelle, ne sait trop bien que « la vie est ailleurs », qu'il est séparé de cette vraie vie, ce colosse irrécusable, et que ce n'est qu'à cette condition qu'il peut vivre cette vie présente intensément ; et que, in fine, l'*ævum* thomiste fondé sur le *Sum qui sum*, ou encore le temps qui reste, lui ouvrira les portes de la résurrection, à moins que la résurrection des morts n'intervienne ici et maintenant, grâce à l'obliquité de la sensation, résurrection toujours renouvelée du vivant transcendant vers la mort....

En conséquence, notre problématique sort de la violence symbolique et de la norme juridique, elle se situe en marge de l'Etat, non en marge d'une vie qui fait semblant, d'une vie songeuse, sans action, contemplant sa biographie sur un album de famille.

5. Conclusions

En conclusion, la veille insère la personne, selon la dialectique existentielle, dans le « véritable état d'exception », en vertu de la formule benjamienne. Elle correspond à la posture du « comme si non » paulinien, et nous délivre, du moins en partie, de la surveillance.

Si nous avons rapproché, puis distingué les théories d'Agamben et de Boutang, grâce à l'arrimation à une aporie politique via l'éthique, il resterait à trouver une autre issue, celui du langage, puisqu'Agamben cherche une issue via un langage inopératif. Ce n'est pas autre chose que cherche à faire Boutang dans son *Art poétique* ou *Les Abeilles de Delphes*. La poésie, le « véritable colosse irrécusable » de René Char serait également en mesure de nous délivrer de l'insomnie et du cauchemar spectaculaire. Si Agamben et Boutang en ont délivré sans aucun doute les plus belles pages, nous renvoyons également le lecteur au deuxième chapitre de notre ouvrage *Sur le sentier de la veille*, où il y trouvera des réflexions sur la poésie de la veille²¹. Le présent article convie donc à une étude comparative entre Boutang et Agamben.

Et c'est ainsi que nous pousserons notre réflexion dans ses derniers retranchements, ce après quoi il conviendrait de

nous arrêter pour laisser le lecteur méditer sur la posture du veilleur dans l'état d'exception.

En effet, l'enjeu du « comme pas » n'est de vivre « comme si » le monde allait être sauvé ; il est question de sauver le monde et, in fine, de se sauver. La veille ne peut s'en tenir à la simple contemplation grecque mais doit transformer la société en tant que telle. Ainsi, Boutang et Agamben vont plus loin qu'un philosophe comme Marcel, lequel déclare : « l'espérance archétype, c'est l'espoir de salut, mais il semble que le salut ne puisse résider que dans la contemplation. Je ne crois pas que ceci puisse être dépassé » (Marcel 1992, 216). C'est ce qu'on appelle forme-de-vie, et qui concerne les singularités qui accomplissent leur *energeia* dans l'œuvre, tels les artistes, mais aussi les artisans. Ainsi, on peut en revenir à la thèse de Benjamin 1) l'histoire est un éternel retour 2) mais « il faut rebrousser l'histoire à rebrousse-poil », ce qui implique un double mouvement, a) un en avancée pure, un progrès de l'histoire mais b) en retour vers le Logos²². Via ce mouvement en arrière et en retour s'accomplit une immanентisation de l'éternité, qui correspond à la *zoè* sacrée se liant à l'Épouse des *Cantiques* [V,2] : « mon esprit dort mais mon cœur veille [NB : le siège de la conscience] ». C'est une société faite de solidarité et d'amour. Le *zoè* sacré réouvre la possibilité d'un temps messianique poétique, c'est-à-dire qui convie à la possibilité d'une communication véritable, laquelle réinvestit le sujet de la singularité de sa parole, tout autant que la possibilité de son silence.

NOTES

¹ Le passage à ce qu'on appelle « biopolitique », qui est passage de la veille à la surveillance, est sûrement née au Caire en 1121 au Caire avec les premiers procédés d'identification instaurés par Mansur al-Amir Bi-Ahkamillah.

² L'originalité de Boutang est de définir la veille à partir du christianisme, de la confronter à la définition philosophique, à la société de surveillance et, enfin, de l'insérer dans une acception plus physiologique, au cœur de la dyade veille/sommeil. C'est là, pensons-nous, que se situe la véritable veille bien avant l'*eschaton* ou encore avant toute philosophie du temps messianique. Tâche difficile que de relier cette veille davantage existentialiste à la théorie de l'état d'exception.

³ N'importe qui peut veiller, certes, mais dans la veillée chrétienne, celui qui veille est forcément baptisé. Le plus dur ce serait donc d'intégrer, dans la société chrétienne, les non-baptisés.

⁴ Tiqqun est également une revue lue par Agamben qui voit dans la théorie du Bloom l'avenue de la singularité Messianique (Agamben, 1994). A ce sujet, Agamben est radical : le „comme si” est une posture nihiliste (Agamben 2022, 67).

⁵ Je cite, en outre, Katia Genel (2004) : « le bio-pouvoir est donc sollicité par Agamben pour penser le tout de l'espace politique, fonctionnant alors selon la matrice qu'est le camp, paroxystiquement bio-pouvoir puisque décision radicale sur la vie nue ».

⁶ Aristote, *De Anima*, 412a. Une telle définition est indispensable pour comprendre la façon dont une philosophie de la veille est intrinsèquement liée à une pensée de la polarité.

⁷ L'expression latine est améliorée du *nunc stans* husserlien.

⁸ Voir le lien suivant : [1 Corinthiens 7:17-24 \(Annotée Neuchâtel\) \(lueur.org\)](https://www.1corinthiens.org/1corinthiens-7-17-24).

⁹ C'est tout l'enjeu d'*Apocalypse du Désir* de Boutang. Mais l'Apocalypse de Boutang n'est pas l'apocalypse telle qu'on l'entend de prime abord et le plus souvent ; le désir restitué à l'homme ne se tient pas à la fin des temps, mais dans un temps de la fin.

¹⁰ A travers ce processus d'individuation advient le paradoxe soulevé par Agamben entre « personnel » et « impersonnel » (Agamben 1994). Selon, le processus d'individuation met en jeu le dernier paradoxe ; mais n'est-ce pas là l'enjeu, la mise du contemporain ? Le véritable contemporain, dans la poésie, est celui qui joue des usages classiques pour les désamorcer avec un jeu de langage actuel. Nous avons déniché une telle saveur des étymons, mélangée, mixée avec des préoccupations postmodernes chez la poétesse Eugenia Paraschiv dans *Linia Frontului* (2019). Ainsi, écrit-elle, en ébauche de toute poétique à venir dans « Le cycle des Armes Invisibles » : « l'adjectif prononce le passé à travers l'apothicaire de l'abîme / Abysses, la fertilité du rien regarde/ Les feux éternels enflammant l'interjection / Dans nos cœurs la lumière scintille pour toujours » (la traduction est nôtre).

¹¹ A notre connaissance, le mot « messianisme » n'apparaît pas dans *l'Ontologie du secret*.

¹² Ce qui veut signifier qu'Agamben n'est pas le père de la philosophie allant à la frontière de tous les temps. Cependant, Agamben va jusqu'au bout de sa pensée à propos d'une ontologie de la puissance. Il partage avec Boutang une érudition biblique remarquable ; et, nonobstant des sources différentes, leurs conclusions sont semblables.

¹³ C'est là une réaction compréhensible, une « résistance » face à l'Universalité du Marché et du Droit exclusif ; mais cette résistance, conduisant à un -anti-, subit l'écueil découvert par Heidegger lecteur de Parménide : tout -anti- va dans la direction de ce contre quoi il lutte ; ainsi, neurotype et neuro-atypique subissent une lutte dialectiquement abstraite de l'intégration spectaculaire dans le Marché, via laquelle le Droit exclut en commettant le « ban ». A l'autre extrémité, dans la reprise du véritable état d'exception, on peut concevoir quelque espèce de nouvelle « fonction » dans cet « atupon » qui a pourtant lieu ; par exemple concevoir la féminité placée sous l'emblème du myrophore,

annonçant la résurrection de Jésus, et de chaque « un » en l'homme du désir. De ce fait, si « nouveau moyen-âge » il y a, au sens de Berdaïev, c'est-à-dire, selon notre réflexion, une réunion nouvelle de la Raison et de la Foi, la place du myrophore est on ne peut plus important ; nous pouvons même stipuler que la véritable exception ne peut être repris que par le Moyen-Age, et sa fidélité à toute terre entendue. L'apôtre de l'apôtre aurait une place plus importante que l'apôtre. Boutang, dans sa définition de la veille, anticipe déjà les conséquences d'une telle réflexion.

¹⁴ C'est le mythe de l'inclusivité qui a intégré nos entreprises et établissements.

¹⁵ Il est question de la « féodalité », concept que Boutang développe dans son livre *Reprendre le pouvoir*.

¹⁶ Il n'est pas question d'être en accord avec la nouvelle maxime « vous ne posséderez rien, mais vous serez heureux ». Au contraire, dans la pensée chrétienne, la possession est source de don. Lorsqu'il n'y a plus de possession, tout peut se marchander.

¹⁷ Voir en l'occurrence Sylvain Stauffer, « un chemin de vie, le monarchisme intériorisé », mémoire soutenu l'Université de théologie pratique de Lausanne. https://wp.unil.ch/lescahiersiltp/files/2017/05/Memoire_Sylvain-STAUFFER.pdf

¹⁸ Nous avons développé ce point dans l'Annexe 6 de notre ouvrage *Sur le sentier de la veille*, le quatrième genre de connaissance supposerait une « connaissance esthétique » au temps d'un temps secret, séparé, se donnant comme manifeste après-coup dans une communauté ; mais, comme pour le troisième genre de connaissance, il reste à savoir si le Sage spinoziste ne risque pas de vivre sous la psychose, et donc d'être « monastique » et « non monastique » à la fois. Le psychotique serait l'homme quantique, où « être » et « n'être pas » seraient susceptibles de coexister dans le même instant. Agamben, de son côté, cherche un genre de vie « aimable » en communauté qui échappe à la tyrannie de la biographie ou des CV ; en quelque sorte, Agamben concrétise le troisième genre de connaissance immanent de Spinoza.

¹⁹ Je cite Agamben (2005, 201) : « *Bild* est donc pour Benjamin tout ce en quoi (objet, œuvre d'art, texte, souvenir ou document) un instant du passé et un instant du présent s'unissent en une constellation à l'intérieur de laquelle le présent doit savoir se reconnaître visé par le passé, et inversement le passé doit trouver dans le présent son sens et son accomplissement ».

²⁰ C'est l'enjeu de la parole prophétique que l'on retrouve chez Agamben (2004, 109) mais aussi chez Boutang (2016, 145-155).

²¹ Même si ces réflexions sont personnelles, elles reprennent, en partie, les réflexions de Boutang dans son *Art poétique* et, prin extenso, celles d'Agamben dans *Le temps qui reste*.

²² C'est ce que nous avons montré à la fin de notre ouvrage *Sur le sentier de la veille*, lequel reprend les démonstrations boutangiennes dans *Ontologie du secret*.

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Inscription et identité : absences, traces, cicatrices

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Abstract

Inscription and Identity: Absences, Traces, Scars

The article talks about a current inscription crisis. It considers a deadlock in the imprinting of things in the mind, because, in a disenchanted world, according to Marcel Gauchet's formula, it is no longer clear which meaning still matters and which does not. Here I investigate a certain *historicity* of the idea of inscription, starting with the thinking of the ancient Greeks, continuing with the medieval period, then modernity, and ending with the perceptions of the contemporary period. The examples brought to the reader's attention are in fact pretexts to probe, briefly, the evolution of attitudes towards writing, from its position as a graphic sign to that of a social signal. The changes in the history of writing and reading indirectly indicate how one society or another would change its systems of signification, favoring some notions and disfavoring others. Thus said, a series of habitus that defined our way of being in the world in a certain era or another, were overvalued or, on the contrary, undervalued. By capturing those ideas and practices that surrounded writing in the infinity of its manifestations, this article highlights various cultural codes, mental universes and collective imaginaries.

Keywords: writing, inscription, trace, vestige, reminiscence, trauma

Dans cet article, nous partons de la simple notion *d'inscription*, vue dans son stade graphique, pour explorer, autant que possible, l'idée du procès d'inscription, appliquée sur le plan émotionnel, mental et, enfin, corporel. Les objets de réminiscence sont des béances de l'espace, des entrées du temps, qui ne sont comblées que par l'absence du défunt (Mihalache 2019, 10-13). L'inscription implique, révèle, ouvre.

Même théoriquement, tout lecteur récompense l'évoqué d'une mémoire posthume un peu rafraîchie. Car les morts ont tendance à être discrets. Mais leur absence nous tire parfois par la manche. Seules ces inscriptions, naïves ou laconiques, nous implorent indirectement. De plus, le procès d'inscription ne se limite pas aux noms et aux années, elle peut n'avoir rien à voir avec l'écriture. De même, l'inscription corporelle est une expression qui ne recouvre pas seulement le tatouage. Nous inscrivons aussi notre corps par la façon dont nous nous séparons ou nous nous rencontrons ; par la façon dont nous nous habillons, nous nous coupons les cheveux ou nous marchons ; rien de ce que le corps émet vers l'extérieur (visuellement) n'échappe au retour vers l'intérieur (émotionnellement).

En écrivant, on se résigne. Du moins de nos jours. La mort ne met pas fin à notre vie, elle nous l'emporte vers un épilogue incessant de notre passage ici, dont certains se souviennent pour d'autres ; puis personne ne s'en souvient, l'oubli étant la seule épitaphe pour nous tous. Il n'en a pas toujours été ainsi. L'écriture prémoderne informait, elle ne rappelait pas. Socrate l'a donnée comme exemple négatif, en invoquant une histoire plus ancienne que son antiquité. Depuis que le roi égyptien Thamus disait au dieu Thot, créateur des lettres : « [...] (l'écriture) produira l'oubli dans l'âme de ceux qui l'auront appris, parce qu'ils cesseront d'exercer leur mémoire : mettant, en effet, leur confiance dans l'écrit, c'est du dehors, grâce à des empreintes étrangères, et non du dedans, grâce à eux-mêmes, qu'ils feront acte de remémoration ; ce n'est donc pas de la mémoire, mais de la remémoration, que tu as trouvé le remède » (Platon 2006, 274c-275b).

Pour aller plus loin, je place tous mes espoirs dans l'excellente reconsidération de Steven Roger Fischer, qui nous avertit que, « transcendant l'oralité, les lois écrites sont devenues visibles dans l'architecture publique afin que tous les lettrés les lisent à haute voix et les partagent avec d'autres. Cependant, comme pour les monuments inscrits de Mésopotamie et d'Égypte, l'objectif principal de l'inscription publique était d'être vue, pas nécessairement d'être lue. Leur présence même leur donnait de l'autorité » (Fischer 2019).

Jacques Derrida nous y aide également, en faisant appel à Thot, le dieu de l'écriture, substitut d'autres dieux et, surtout, de la posthumisation des hommes par l'écriture : « Dans tous les cycles de la mythologie égyptienne, Thot préside à l'organisation de la mort. Le maître de l'écriture, des nombres et du calcul, n'inscrit pas seulement le poids des âmes mortes, il aura d'abord compté les jours de la vie [...] Son arithmétique couvre aussi les événements de la biographie divine. [...] Il se comporte comme un chef du protocole funéraire et on le charge en particulier de la toilette du mort. » (Derrida 1972, 283-4)

La parole (et non l'écrit) était le modèle suprême de communication dans la Grèce antique (Cornea 1988). Contrairement à l'Égypte, où l'écriture constituait un idéogramme, une figure ou un dessin, la Grèce n'accordait pas beaucoup d'importance à l'image. C'était en opposition évidente aux Orientaux, qui jumelaient le texte et la peinture « les associant non seulement sur le plan morphologique et visuel, mais aussi sur le plan conceptuel et intellectuel » (Cornea 1988, 100). Dans notre passé archaïque, lire signifiait déchiffrer dans l'âme, dans le visage, dans les étoiles ; et écrire était la même chose que dessiner, peindre, broder (Oişteanu 2004, 249) ; même si l'écriture est parfois cachée au regard, pour la rendre absente au monde ; et puis, mise en lumière pour nous révéler ses imminences (Herodote).

Plus tard, les appréhensions modernes nous parviennent notamment par le biais de la littérature, mais une littérature qui prend le Moyen Âge comme source d'inspiration. C'est pourquoi nous incluons ici le *Château des destins croisés*, où Italo Calvino assimile la sainteté à la solitude mais aussi à l'écriture. Les objets pour lire et écrire sont placés parmi les rochers, les herbes, les lézards, ils deviennent des produits et des instruments de la continuité minérale-végétale-animale ; *l'écrit porte toujours en lui l'effacement de celui qui l'a écrit, ainsi que de celui qui le lira* (Calvino 1998). La nature non articulée englobe la parole humaine dans son discours (ibid.). Au fond, aucune plaque commémorative ne nous dit plus rien aujourd'hui si notre regard ne la scrute pas. Le vieux Socrate, invoqué par Platon dans le Phèdre déjà cité, l'affirmait également : « Socrate :

Car, à mon avis, ce qu'il y a de terrible, Phèdre, c'est la ressemblance qu'entretient l'écriture avec la peinture. De fait, les êtres qu'engendre la peinture se tiennent debout comme s'ils étaient vivants ; mais qu'on les interroge, ils restent figés dans une pose solennelle et gardent le silence. Et il en va de même pour les discours. On pourrait croire qu'ils parlent pour exprimer quelque réflexion ; mais, si on les interroge, parce qu'on souhaite comprendre ce qu'ils disent, c'est une seule chose qu'ils se contentent de signifier, toujours la même. Autre chose : quand, une fois pour toutes, il a été écrit, chaque discours va rouler de droite et de gauche et passe indifféremment auprès de ceux qui s'y connaissent, comme auprès de ceux dont ce n'est point l'affaire ; de plus, il ne sait pas quels sont ceux à qui il doit ou non s'adresser. Que par ailleurs s'élèvent à son sujet des voix discordantes et qu'il soit injustement injurié, il a toujours besoin du secours de son père ; car il n'est capable ni de se défendre ni de se tirer d'affaire tout seul. » (Platon 2006, 275d-e). On ne peut donc pas éviter la fameuse distinction qu'Umberto Eco (1979) a faite entre le « texte fermé », *utilisé* selon le but premier de l'auteur, d'une part, et le « texte ouvert », *interprété* en vertu des attentes que le Lecteur Modèle développe, d'autre part. Mais nous garderons pour nos jours la formule assez oxymorique de Paul Valéry, dont Eco tient compte : *il n'y a pas de vrai sens dans un texte*. Le sémioticien italien répète ainsi, sur le même ton paradoxal, que « rien n'est plus ouvert qu'un texte fermé » (ibid.). C'est la seule façon d'aborder les inscriptions, aussi typisées soient-elles. Même si nous sommes face au même « serviteur de Dieu », la récurrence de cette formule (et sa comptabilisation) nous offre quand même quelques hypothèses de travail, car le Moyen Âge a aussi ses atouts : « Il y a une sorte de monuments dont tous les historiens du Moyen Âge entendirent s'aider et purent effectivement tirer parti : ce sont les tombeaux. Tous, les uns plus sporadiquement, les autres plus systématiquement, ont cherché les sépultures et relevé les épitaphes gravées sur elles ou auprès d'elles pour en nourrir leur histoire. Dès l'époque carolingienne les auteurs de catalogues épiscopaux utilisaient, lorsqu'ils pouvaient, les inscriptions funéraires. Au XIe siècle, Raoul Glaber fut un si

habile épigraphiste que plusieurs monastères l'employèrent à déchiffrer et restaurer leurs épitaphes anciennes rongées par le temps. Lorsque, au début du XIV^e siècle, Etienne Maleu entreprit d'écrire l'histoire de l'église de Saint-Junien, il s'aida sans doute d'une liste de dix-sept prévôts qui s'y étaient succédé et sut par un obituaire le jour de leur mort ; mais il chercha toujours aussi à retrouver leur tombeau. Pour les onze premiers, l'historien ne put qu'avouer l'insuccès de ses recherches ; c'est simplement à partir du douzième prévôt qu'il peut dire le lieu de sa sépulture, lire son épitaphe et donner l'année de sa mort : 1226. Lorsque, au milieu du XIV^e siècle, un historien dont le nom nous est inconnu entreprit d'établir la généalogie des comtes de Savoie, il fit un systématique usage des épitaphes qu'il put relever sur les tombeaux de ceux des membres de la famille qui avaient été enterrés à l'abbaye d'Hautecombe. Sa tâche fut d'autant plus aisée que le comte Amédée avait, en 1342, fait transférer ces corps du cloître de l'abbaye dans la chapelle qu'il venait de faire construire et que cette translation avait, à n'en pas douter, favorisé l'étude des sépultures et des épitaphes. [...] qui voulait faire des sépultures une utilisation systématique ne pouvait pas remonter si loin, soit que les morts anciens se perdissent sur place dans l'anonymat des tombes sans épitaphe, ou dans la foule des épitaphes sans intérêt, soit que l'historien n'eût guère les moyens de découvrir hors de son cadre étroit et familier l'inscription dont il aurait eu besoin. » (Guenée 1980, 84, 89)

L'inscription dans l'esprit ou dans le marbre fait référence à au moins un nom. Pour l'amour des gens, les mots veulent proliférer ; c'est-à-dire multiplier les mondes en moi ou en toi, surtout sous la forme d'un prénom : « Elle [la mère] fit sur lui un signe de croix dans l'obscurité et l'appela dans son cœur par le nom qu'il choisirait plus tard pour lui-même : Poverello. » (Hesse 2015). Le nom est le mot le plus actif, celui qui annonce le cours de notre vie. Donné par les autres et non par nous-mêmes, le nom est, du moins en théorie, une empreinte du baptême sur la biographie qui, du point de vue du destin, doit en découler. Poverello confirme le nom pressenti naguère par la mère ; ainsi, le « Petit pauvre » devient une

actualité perpétuellement remise à jour, mais sans doute mise à la disposition changeante de la mémoire. Le nom est une cause du destin. On en change pour s'écarter du mauvais cours prophétisé de la vie. Mais le nom est un nom propre, et la majuscule est un monopole du divin. Il ne peut pas nous déguiser. Et il ne peut pas nous protéger de ce qui nous arrive. Car le nom d'une personne n'est que la conséquence de tous les obstacles vaincus à un moment donné. C'est ainsi que nous nous souvenons de nous-mêmes : un tel, la vie, l'œuvre. Un bon nom vous apprend à le vivre. C'est pourquoi les grands noms du domaine ne s'efforcent même pas dans ce sens, insistant sur la « gestualisation » de l'écriture : « Il est faux de dire que l'écriture fixe la pensée. Écrire, c'est une manière de penser. Il n'y a pas de pensée qui ne soit pas articulée par un geste. La pensée avant l'articulation n'est qu'une virtualité, donc rien. Elle se réalise par le geste. À la rigueur on ne pense pas avant de gesticuler. Le geste d'écrire est un geste de travail grâce auquel des pensées sont réalisées en forme de textes » (Flusser 2014, 50).

La modernité a anémié sa métaphysique de l'infini, tendant, comme le montre Michel Foucault, à prendre pour telles les perspectives étroites que l'homme avait sur lui-même. La simple modification des représentations de l'infini, d'une part, et des perceptions de l'individu, d'autre part, n'aurait cependant pas pu engendrer une véritable révolution de la pensée. Si les deux mutations avaient agi indépendamment l'une de l'autre, l'être humain, en tant que sujet de connaissance accessible à nous, ne se serait pas imposé depuis le XIX^e siècle. A un autre regard sur l'infini devait donc s'ajouter une autre vision de l'humanité : « la finitude de l'homme se profile sous la forme paradoxale de l'indéfini ; elle indique, plutôt que la rigueur de la limite, la monotonie d'un cheminement ; qui n'a sans doute pas de borne mais qui n'est peut-être sans espoir. [...] Mais à l'expérience de l'homme, un corps est donné qui est son corps – fragment d'espace ambigu, dont la spatialité propre et irréductible s'articule cependant sur l'espace des choses. [...] Sans doute, au niveau des apparences, la modernité commence lorsque l'être humain se met à exister à l'intérieur de son organisme, dans la coquille de sa tête, dans

l'armature de ses membres, et parmi toute la nervure de sa physiologie ; [...] lorsqu'il loge sa pensée dans les plis d'un langage tellement plus vieux que lui qu'il n'en peut maîtriser les significations ranimées pourtant par l'insistance de sa parole. » (Foucault 1996, 325 et 329)

Dès lors, explique Michel Foucault, la finitude de l'homme ne se traduit plus selon des critères extérieurs, l'être humain étant jugé de manière autonome, dans ses propres limites. Et le premier repère a été le corps, dans lequel se niche, de plus en plus solidement, une identité qui jusqu'alors assimilée à la seule âme. En regardant par dessous de notre peau, le sens de la vie recrute des signifiants terrestres ; et l'anatomie revendique une surface, un lieu, une étendue dont il peut être le signifié. L'écriture est un psychopompe, protestaient les anciens. Elle envoie les souvenirs dans le même cercueil que le défunt. Et la rédaction des mémoriaux est trop concluante. C'est pourquoi ils ne nous plaisent pas. Ils devraient être racontés en quelque sorte, mais qui raconte l'histoire d'une affiche ? Voici la théorie : on pense qu'une inscription – une fois remarquée par plusieurs citoyens – initiera une mémoire collective, aussi sommaire soit-elle ; ou du moins une mémoire historique, diffusée dans le savoir privé et non partagé de ceux qui malgré tout lisent et ne se contentent pas juste de regarder une inscription. Nous sommes accompagnés d'une mise en garde : en lisant on apprend, mais il n'est pas obligatoire de s'en souvenir. C'est aussi ce que craignait Primo Levi (1987), lorsqu'il écrivait ses mémoires et les préfaçait d'une sorte de malédiction versifiée. Il laissait ses souvenirs individuels aux réitérations collectives, non sans un air de contrainte, d'engagement, de punition : « N'oubliez pas que cela fut, / Non, ne l'oubliez pas : / Gravez ces mots dans votre cœur. / Pensez-y chez vous, dans la rue, / En vous couchant, en vous levant ; / Répétez-les à vos enfants. / Que votre maison s'écroule, / Que la maladie vous accable, / Que vos enfants se détournent de vous. »

Aujourd'hui, la question que je poserais semble bien plus mesquine : qui s'arrêterait pour déchiffrer une plaque commémorative ? Dans le flux actuel des rues métropolitaines, il serait plutôt étrange d'interrompre la course des autres par

un arrêt contemplatif. Autrefois, les inscriptions commémoratives étaient associées aux boulevards de promenade ou à ce qu'on appelle la « rue principale » ou à la « grande rue » de chaque ville. C'était une artère des revendications ou d'affichages de statut social. Et une inscription qui prétendait défendre la mémoire de quelqu'un dans ces espaces consacrés tentait sa chance. A l'époque moderne, de l'urbanisme qui stabilise les lieux de mémoire, l'inscription ne *commémore* pas ; elle met toutefois le passé sous nos yeux ; c'est-à-dire qu'elle le *visualise* ; le soumet à la lettre, que l'on a d'abord vue puis que l'on a eu beaucoup plus de mal à comprendre : « La littéralité, c'est le choc, l'invisible, l'irregardable, l'intolérable qui vous repousse, qui vous renvoie. Nous regardons, nous sommes éveillés pour regarder que nous sommes regardés, parce que quelque chose nous regarde, demande, justement, à se faire image, à entrer, insupportablement, dans le visible. » (Ghiu 2008, 121) La mémoire publique transforme la littéralité en gesticulation graphique. La lettre est aujourd'hui un *signe* qui accroît sa distance à la *signification* ; afin que cet intervalle élargi puisse tenir suffisamment d'image, d'imagination, d'imaginaire ; quel que ce soit, ils reçoivent une mission récupératrice. De même que l'enfance n'est pas seulement le début de la vie, mais aussi l'analogie du reste de la biographie qui lui succède, *in-corporant* à la conscience de l'adulte des réflexes, des états et des grilles de perception actualisées on ne sait quand (cf. Benjamin 2014), de même l'histoire des rues est-elle un ensemble diachronique d'indices, d'indicateurs, d'indications. De leurs petits rectangles, les inscriptions ne font pas revivre un passé, elles le signalent. Elles possèdent « la vérité de la parole qui invoque et qui nomme » (Afloroaei 2018, 126). Elles ne sautent pas aux yeux et ne passent pas sous les paupières. Ce serait trop leur demander : se souvenir est une incision du regard.

Une vérité rappelée est-elle une vérité prouvée ? Non. L'alphabet creusé dans le marbre y est plutôt enfoui. Il ne visualise pas les rétrodictions. Il n'imprime pas non plus les graphèmes du regret dans la chair du remords : « Mais notre vie ne nous montre pas non plus de telles expériences sans reste, mais elle montre le fait que tous ses événements sont

pris dans un environnement qui demeure, qui donne à ces événements un sens, pour lequel au moins l'émerveillement qu'ils ont suscité donne de la consistance au reste qu'ils laissent derrière eux. D'un côté, la peur devant le reste ; de l'autre, la fascination qu'il exerce et qui le rapproche en quelque sorte de l'expérience du sacré, peut-être en tant que genre de ce dernier. Le serpent qui se consume la queue peut être un symbole ancestral de la peur et de l'adoration du reste. [...] Je peux faire référence aux restes d'un être qui n'existe plus et que je place dans le domaine de l'invisible pour confirmer son inexistence. Ou, à l'inverse, aux restes qui invoquent pour moi un monde ou un être disparu, que je garde pour pouvoir m'en souvenir et le vénérer. [...] Un autre sens s'insinue dans mon esprit : le reste-mémoire, ce que nous reconnaissons restant comme produit d'un événement parce que l'esprit lui-même le conserve comme preuve de sa participation à cet événement, mais aussi comme mesure ou même témoignage de sa vérité » (Baumgarten 2021, 28, 36-37).

L'inscription ne combat pas une absence. Elle ne reconditionne pas la mémoire de quelqu'un. Elle nous l'impute. Rien n'est laissé à l'épiderme du texte. Les inscriptions en hommage renforcent-elles la statue ou compensent-elles son inexistence ? Ou, pour forcer une prédiction, faut-il croire que l'inscription est une prémonition du monument du forum public ? Peu probable. L'inscription est donc une chronique de ce qui est déjà perdu, l'aboutissement des réminiscences. Elle ne fait pas l'éloge de ce qui est évoqué ; elle n'apaise pas non plus les remords de celui qui l'évoque. L'inscription est une trace déjà effacée d'une présence jadis prégnante. Paul Ricœur nous le suggère également, dans sa glose sur la terminologie d'Aristote : « Il appartient en effet à la notion d'inscription de comporter référence à l'autre [...] L'absence, comme l'autre de la présence ! Prenons, dit Aristote, un exemple : la figure peinte d'un animal. On peut faire de ce tableau une double lecture : soit le considérer en lui-même, comme simple dessin peint sur un support, soit comme une *eikon* (« une copie »). On le peut, car l'inscription consiste dans les deux choses à la fois : elle est elle-même et la représentation d'autre chose (*allou phantasma*) ; ici, le vocabulaire d'Aristote est précis : Il

réserve le terme *phantasma* pour l'inscription en tant qu'elle-même et celui d'*eikôn* pour la référence à l'autre que l'inscription. [...] La distinction entre *mnèmé* et *anamnesis* repose sur deux traits : d'un côté, le simple souvenir survient à la manière d'une affection, tandis que le rappel consiste en une recherche active. » (Ricoeur 2000, 21-22) Paul Ricoeur glose aussi sur un écrit aristotélicien bien connu, *De anima*. En pensant aux inscriptions, nous en retenons l'idée que la mémoire est plutôt un réflexe, alors que la réminiscence est plutôt un raisonnement. L'inscription relève du chapitre des évocations involontaires, non de la recherche active. Ricoeur n'oublie pas « la métaphore de l'empreinte, dont celle de l'inscription veut être une variante, fait appel au « mouvement » (*kinēsis*), dont l'empreinte résulte ». L'inscription serait comme une pierre dans la rivière, dirait aujourd'hui le sculpteur Mauro Corona, une empreinte mémorielle dans le fluide destructeur de l'oubli : « Les absences laissent des empreintes, des traces profondes que l'on ne peut combler, quoi que l'on y ajoute. C'est une question de compléments, on aime pour être aimé, on donne pour recevoir. Mais lorsqu'on on perd, on perd. Les fuites et les absences ne laissent pas d'échappatoire, elles marquent la vie, elles tracent le chemin, elles déterminent le destin, elles indiquent l'avenir. » (Corona 2011) Des intellectuels et d'autres n'ont pas seulement cherché des excuses à ces comportements, aussi candides qu'étranges. Kierkegaard (2015), par exemple, a une explication qui est plutôt un constat : l'homme s'accroche à la vie avec la crainte ambiguë de pouvoir la perdre et de pouvoir la garder. En d'autres occasions, j'ai également analysé les différentes manières de rendre *présente au niveau de l'idée une personne qui est physiquement absente* : l'Eucharistie, l'icône, l'effigie en cire, l'építaphe, la statue funéraire, la photographie, le monument public (Mihalache 2014, 33-46, 47-69, 113-142). Et quel en serait le lien avec les inscriptions urbaines ? L'idée d'absence développe, de manière subsidiaire, le sens le plus insistant de *l'habitation* : « Je crois aux lieux, non pas aux grands, mais aux petits, aux inconnus, de l'étranger comme de chez nous. Je crois à ces lieux, sans résonance et sans nom significatif, simplement parce qu'il n'y

a *rien* là, alors que tout autour il y a *quelque chose*. Je crois au pouvoir de ces lieux, parce qu'il ne s'y passe *plus* rien (ou rien ne s'y passe *encore*). [...] Là, nous ne verrons aucun signe. Là, nous aurons simplement été. » (Handke 2000) Les inscriptions de rue font également partie de la galerie des processus de vivification de l'image, et pas nécessairement en fin de liste. Des voix autorisées soutiennent leur cause, parmi lesquelles le grand écrivain argentin Jorge Luis Borges (1984, 113-114), qui suggère aussi, dans son style pittoresque et ironique, la méthode de travail : « Mon lecteur doit imaginer une voiture. [...] La voiture reste en place, et sur l'un de ses côtés, il y a une inscription. Le classicisme du bidonville l'a décrété, et bien que cette empreinte expressive, superposée aux expressions visibles de la résistance, de la forme, du destin, de la hauteur, de la réalité, je confirme l'accusation de bavardage dont nous félicitent les conférenciers européens, je ne peux pas le cacher, car c'est le sujet de cette note. Je suis depuis longtemps un chasseur de ce genre d'écrits : les épigraphes du bidonville, qui impliquent une errance et un vagabondage sans fin, qui sont plus poétiques que les pièces rassemblées, de plus en plus rares à notre époque gâtée par les étrangers italiens. Je ne vais pas renverser pièces de ce capital collecté sur la table, mais juste vous en montrer quelques-unes. »

La trace nous fait soupçonner que nous marchons sur un « petit chemin » indécis ; cependant, lorsque nous le respectons et que nous retraçons fidèlement son itinéraire, nous nous retrouvons sur une « autoroute » qui nous emmène tout droit à notre destination ; mais à une condition : les traces n'aiment pas la précision avec laquelle elles sont retracées ; elles sont fidèles à *l'imagination* qu'elles suscitent en nous. Le premier roman que Milan Kundera publia en exil avait pour titre un slogan/inscription de mai 1968 : *La vie est ailleurs*. La formule nous oriente dans une autre direction, suggère d'autres traces à vénérer, d'autres à effacer ; mais ce qui compte, ce sont celles que nous établissons nous-mêmes et ensuite que nous rafraîchissons également, tout en maintenant vivant le nouveau parcours existentiel : de la maison au cimetière et pas nécessairement en sens inverse. L'auteur protège l'épicentre du récit par divers détournements épiques ; ils inscrivent

inlassablement des contours et initient sans cesse les étants ; qui épatent aussi la post-existence, en soulignant l'échec, la fin, la chute du rideau, la discorde et le ressentiment. La trace n'est pas une métonymie. Elle n'est pas la miniature d'une réalité, mais sa perturbation. La trace est une présomption : nous ne savons pas exactement ce qui *s'est passé*, plutôt quelque chose *se sera passé* ; nous jouons à pile ou face parce que nous n'étions pas présents à ce qui s'est passé. La trace nous intrigue d'abord, puis nous informe. Elle cultive les soupçons, les fabulations, les estimations : dans la vie, dans la mort, dans l'amour, dans tout à la fois. Ce sont des corps, des réalités ou des mondes entiers qui se développent autour d'une cicatrice, comme dans les romans d'Harry Potter ; ce sont des amputations, des plaies, des taches solaires qui agrandissent autour du regard qui les augmente, elle les attèle, sans scrupules, au char du couple éternel *éros* et *thanatos* ; ou, pour avoir l'air prétentieux, nous partagerons le discours de Susan Stewart (1993, 23) : « This point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire. »

La trace nous donne trop peu de ce tout, de ce *quelque chose* qui l'a causée. Elle nous met sur la route. Nous commençons à l'aimer si cela se répète ; mais nous la détestons si elle ne veut mener nulle part. La trace ne nous confronte pas à l'inconnu, elle nous tente avec une nouvelle espèce de vérité qu'elle ne nous enseigne pas, mais qu'elle abrège. Elle n'est pas une dénonciation, elle est une signature. À l'ère des prélèvements d'ADN, la trace trahit le chercheur plutôt que le recherché. La trace est le meilleur acteur des histoires policières, d'horreur ou de science-fiction.

En termes de rapports de *présence-absence*, il existe plusieurs types d'inscription :

a) *la trace* : que nous portons en nous sans en avoir conscience, bien que d'autres, vivant à d'autres époques, la ressentent et nous la signalent ;

b) *l'empreinte* : c'est l'écho d'une société dans laquelle nous avons vécu, à laquelle nous nous sommes identifiés, et à laquelle nous voulons désespérément appartenir ;

c) *la cicatrice* : c'est un reste post-traumatique qui peut soutenir l'effort d'intégration de l'individu dans une

communauté autrefois marquée par une tragédie (les Juifs partis en Israël après la guerre) ; la cicatrice représente un monde dont les valeurs n'ont pas résisté au choc (à l'Holocauste), mais qui ont néanmoins été réimposées à ceux qui sont restés, comme étant les seules capables de justifier leur existence ; le meilleur exemple en serait le sentiment d'aliénation du survivant dans la prose d'Aharon Appelfeld ;

d) *le vestige* : c'est ce passé qui est capable de se désintégrer, de se capillariser dans d'autres époques et, surtout, de s'ancrer dans le présent et d'avoir quelque chose à dire au présent ; il n'appartient à personne en particulier, mais s'il est en danger, nombreux sont ceux qui s'en sentent responsables ;

e) *la réminiscence* : c'est un échantillon de biographie sur lequel nous trébuchons par hasard et que nous rejetons dans un premier temps ; nous ne nous l'approprions que lorsque nous constatons que la même chose arrive à d'autres, et que cette façon d'être appartient à beaucoup d'autres.

Nous ne sommes pas les rebuts de certaines époques révolues, mais nous portons partout les traces laissées en chaque homme par les nombreuses années. Et la réciproque est valable : le temps emporte avec lui les empreintes que nos actes creusent profondément au plus profond de son flux apparemment anodin, apparemment égal pour tous. C'est pourquoi *tatouer* est presque la même chose que l'inhalation d'expériences qui vous marquent d'un signe, un souvenir perpétuel ; ou c'est un peu comme *l'in-carnation*, dans le sens d'*in-corporer* ce qui a été vécu ; le corps est le chevalet du temps. Et les spécialistes disent que le corps est soit une *fonction* de l'ensemble anatomique, soit un *instrument* de la vie dans son ensemble, soit un *outil* de la conscience. Nous rassemblons ici quelques « rapiècements » mémoriels, pour rendre hommage à tout un passé qui nous est si inexplicable qu'il ne peut nouer aucun rapport avec le présent. Lorsqu'il s'agit de retracer une généalogie violemment déchirée par les guerres, les diagrammes de causes et effets capitulent inconditionnellement : « Sans même m'en rendre compte, j'arrive rue Geoffroy-l'Asnier au Mémorial de la Shoah. *J'aime passer par le sas de sécurité, caresser le mur immense où sont gravés les milliers de noms des victimes du nazisme.* Parmi la

multitude des juifs assassinés, je cherche l'inscription. Elle n'est pas facile à repérer. Je la trouve enfin tout en haut, à gauche : Isaac Abramovici, né le 11 novembre 1914 à Pitești, Roumanie. (s.n.A.M.)". (Abramovici 2014). Le nom des personnes tuées n'est pas lu. Il est tâtonné et caressé ; libéré de toutes les scories du temps, de la nature, de l'amnésie. Au fond, l'absence d'inscription est, elle aussi, une inscription. Quelle que soit son apparence, elle contient celui que l'on cherche. C'est une métonymie de toute sa vie, pas du moment qui a marqué sa fin. Malheureusement, l'écriture est toujours trop pauvre. Mais elle nous rend co-présents ; comme si nous dessinions ensemble – nous, de nos jours, et eux, d'on ne sait quand – le cours d'un destin commun, que les descendants de la victime veulent s'approprier comme s'ils avaient été eux aussi dans le camp.

Plus d'une fois nous avons été frappés par la littéralité avec laquelle le nécrologe ou l'inscription du cimetière font une échographie de « l'anorexie » de la vie par rapport à « l'obésité » de l'éternité. Et, à travers leur prisme sophistiqué, nous évaluons les inscriptions funéraires – où qu'elles soient abandonnées – comme des occurrences arbitraires de la mort, et non comme des preuves de sa surveillance. L'inscription/ le procès d'inscrire a-t-elle encore une chance de guérir les absences physiques ? Ou de replacer le *non-être* sous le charme des automatismes verbaux ? Yuval Noah Harari (2017, 185) a réalisé que « Si l'écrit fut sans doute conçu comme un modeste moyen de décrire la réalité, il devint peu à peu un instrument puissant pour la remodeler. » La vapeur des mots fait un tic-tac condensé, suspendu frissonnant de la froideur de son, sa, votre absence. En lisant les mots d'une plaque, imprimons-nous quelque chose en nous ? Quels résidus de gravure inhalons-nous ? de la vie dans la mémoire, de la logique dans la pensée, de la capitulation dans les attentes ? Espérons que l'œil entraîne la mémoire. Et que l'inscription est un événement du regard. Elle ne se rend pas à la surface, au lissage, à l'effacement du connu. S'affirmant comme figure visuelle de l'identification et comme outil de l'approfondissement du sens, l'inscription implique néanmoins une certaine lassitude de l'habiter ; un déficit, une anémie de la présence du vécu dans le

périmètre existentiel de la domiciliation exercée. Pour autant, rouillée et ignorée, une simple plaque ne succombe pas trop facilement à l'amnésie collective. Son usure même est un indicateur de la mémorisation de nos expériences. Lesquelles ? Celles par lesquelles sont passés à la fois l'objet nu et la conscience de son lecteur. D'une croix autrefois, par exemple, le temps décroche, une à une, les lettres d'un nom : enfoui tout entassé à la racine des souvenirs de celui qu'on a perdu. Puis, dans notre mémoire, les lettres de plus en plus pâles perdent également leur son correspondant ; qui s'installe, non pas phonétiquement, mais hiéroglyphiquement, sur ce que le disparu voudrait garder sous silence pour lui seul.

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Principles, Models, and Representations of the Social Order

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the hypothesis according to which, having a great importance in the history of mankind, social order is characterized by peaceful coexistence rather than violence, by predictability rather than hazard, and by cooperation rather than isolation. The aim of the study is to underline that, in practice, all these features could not ensure the desirable social order which, on its turn, has to be linked with good and justice. Among the various models of social order analyzed by political philosophy and political theory, we have settled on the one that takes into account the way in which social order is experienced by individuals. Thus, individuals acquire different representations of social order. In everyday life, people use different cognitive and conceptual schemes for explaining and justifying social order and the features of social relationships. Our thesis is that, for having a better understanding of both the individuals' behavior and ideals, it is important to identify and analyze the intellectual origins related to the models of social order. In this respect, we present several liberal philosophical perspectives related to Hobbes and Locke's works. Moreover, we correlate this approach with other important philosophical directions, theorized in the sphere of conservative, libertarian and communitarian political philosophy. In accordance with these normative perspectives, the paper highlights the nexus between political philosophy and psychology in shaping different patterns of political representations related with social order.

Keywords: Communitarianism, Conservatism, justice, Liberalism, Libertarianism, social order, social representation

I.

Maintaining the social order involves the organization of society in a way that violence is kept under control and peace

ensured (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009, xi). For the existence of social order this could be seen as a necessary but not sufficient condition. As a matter of fact, we can imagine a world in which people are organized in such a way that violence is impossible and social order is still lacking. For example, we can imagine a place where there is a robust conviction that any individual's violent action against others will bring enormous harm to all, and where an invented mechanism is attached, without exception, at birth to everyone. Despite the context, this mechanism couldn't be eliminated, being useful for inhibiting aggression. Due to such mechanism, at the slightest signs of aggression, an inhibitor is triggered, avoiding the expansion of the violent action. Therefore, in such a world peace would prevail.

Continuing our imaginary scenario, anyone can do any kind of action, except those which imply physical aggression. In such a world there are no other moral norms or procedures that indicate desirable social actions, or other penal institutions. The mechanism guarantees only nonviolence. It won't be possible to anticipate the behaviors of others. Therefore, life will be totally unpredictable and it will be impossible for people to work together. However, this mechanism could encourage different actions that could disturb, upset, or offend. Under the circumstance that violence is prohibited and there are neither rules nor instances for limiting behaviors and associations, a complete exposure of each individual to everyone's whims would arise. In this kind of scenario, where everything can happen at any time, except violence, the disorder becomes obvious. It would be a chaotic world. Thus, one could observe that the lack of violence doesn't necessarily conduct to social order. In this respect, it becomes obvious the absence of two elementary dimensions which are strongly related to social order: reasonableness/cooperation and regularity/ predictability (Elster 1992).

It is reductionist to correlate social order only with the control of violence. Social order could be seen in terms of arrangements, institutions, practices, and functional rules that make social life predictable (Dellavalle 2021, 4). This kind of social order facilitates cooperation and coordination of different social activities (Hechter & Horne, 2003a). "The regularity,

repetition, and predictability of everyday social life are constitutive of social order, at both macro and micro levels.” (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2015, 1) Social order refers to the complex social world in which there are functional and respected rules. This social world is characterized by peaceful coexistence rather than violence, predictability rather than hazard, and cooperation rather than isolation.

All these features couldn't ensure the desirability of the social order. Using our imaginative function once again, we can imagine a totalitarian society, where the opponents of political establishment have disappeared, and the monist political ideology has been accepted and internalized by everyone. In this kind of society violence is controlled and used only by the police, in specific and special conditions. Also, in this society there are respected rules that make life predictable down to the last detail. Individuals are placed in a complete and continuous framework of surveillance. Individuals have to coordinate their actions and cooperate in simple and complex actions, performing tasks that involve collaboration. Nevertheless, the hyper-order met in this kind of totalitarian society is incompatible with human dignity, freedom, and moral traditions. As a result, this is a dysfunctional social order that makes the decent and good life impossible.

When we take social order into consideration, we have to deal with ethical issues (Dellavalle 2021, 4-5). In this context, political philosophy is relevant for analyzing the social order's ethical dimension. Political philosophy is the field that takes into account this component of the social order. Political philosophy, interested in the study of good life and society (Strauss 1988), seeks answers to questions such as: why should exist political authority; what should be the principles of organizing the right community; what is the referential model for governing the community. In correlation with these normative questions, political philosophy could be defined, as David Miller pointed out (2003), as “an investigation into the nature, causes, and effects of good and bad government” (2). Thus, the government could represent “the whole body of rules, practices, and institutions under whose guidance we live together in societies” (Miller 2003, 4). In trying to find the best formula for good governance,

political philosophy suggests or constructs different normative models of the social order.

Social order is also experienced under circumstances in which individuals have various mental representations of the society. In everyday life, people use different conceptual frameworks for explaining both social order and the features of social relationships. To obtain a better understanding of both citizens' behavior and the nature of their social ideals it is quite important to identify the philosophical perspectives related to social order.

II.

In the 17th century, in the field of political philosophy, Thomas Hobbes theorized the problem of social order (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2015, 2; Inglis 2006, 110). This can be reduced to the following question: how is it possible for individuals to live together, to create and maintain functional societies? (Udehn 1996, 347; Hechter and Horne 2003a). Hobbes' classical answer in the field of social theory emphasized the primordial role played by the state: social order is ensured by the sovereign political power (Hechter and Horne 2003b, 159-160). Hobbes (2003) pointed out that individuals have both rationality, which could be used correctly (32-35), and numerous desires. Among these desires, there stands a continuous and constant need to obtain as much power as possible (Hobbes 2003, 70). The skills represent the egalitarian condition of the individuals. The interaction between individual skills and limited resources creates premises for the conflicts (Hobbes 2003, 87). Hobbes (2003) described in negative terms the condition of man in the state of nature (86-90). In the absence of the institutional framework, the man lives in insolation and deprivation, having a brutal, ugly, and short life, permanently being exposed to the generalized war (Hobbes 2003, 89). Being defined by the fear of death and wishing prosperity and peace, the rational individual aims to transcend this state – the state of nature is characterized by the lack of justice or injustice, rightness or wrongness, law or property (Hobbes 2003, 90). Hobbes (2003) incorporated the natural percepts in the rule: treat others as you would like to be treated (109). In the absence of the

authority, able to enforce principles and to punish those who violate them, all the natural percepts could remain only simple words – no one respects them because they contradict both the passions and the necessary prudence (Hobbes 2003, 117). In this respect, it is necessary to create the civic community, to establish the sovereign power through a contract/agreement among each with each other, so that all individuals yield to public authority and secure protection from everyone (Hobbes 2003, 120-121). Only then could the natural percepts become laws (Hobbes 2003, 185). Civil laws, seen in terms of compulsory rules, make social life possible. Also, these rules help us to distinguish between justice and injustice, correct or incorrect, proper or improper, permitted or forbidden (Hobbes 2003, 183). The rules ensure peaceful coexistence, the predictability of social life, and human collaboration.

Staring from both the helpless condition of the man in the natural state and its deep desire to preserve life, Hobbes demonstrated the importance and necessity of ensuring the social order. Hobbes (2003) considered that political structure and governance protect people from themselves – the biggest deficiencies that could appear in the civic community are insignificant in comparison with the terrible horrors that the civil war entails when the center of power and the rules imposed by it have been dissipated (128). Moreover, Hobbes (2003) emphasized that through the civic agreement each citizen becomes the author of the established power's actions, thus no one can accuse the sovereign of being unjust or, in other words, of inflicting any kind of prejudice upon the citizen (124).

Therefore, according to Hobbes' philosophical perspective, civil laws, ensured by the sovereign, couldn't be unjust. But what exactly makes them good? Hobbes (2003) stressed that a law, in order to be good, has to be necessary, clear, and conceived in the benefit of people and, of course, to be able to achieve its purpose (239-240). The purpose of the law is not to make freedom impossible, the aim is to protect people from the harm they can do themselves, to keep individuals in the field of peaceful coexistence (Hobbes 2003, 239-240). The aim of the law is not related to the control of the whole life. Laws that are not necessary are considered by Hobbes only "trapps for mony" (240).

Hobbes emphasizes that the sovereign will ensure the goodness of laws. However, in case of failure, how could we relate ourselves to political power and social order? Most part of political scholars interested in the field of human rights protection and mechanisms of controlling and limiting political power considered that Hobbes does not have a satisfactory answer to these kinds of questions.

Despite the critics, liberal political philosophy received a strong boost through the individualist-constructivist approach of social order developed by Thomas Hobbes. However, the perspective developed by John Locke in his treatises on governance should be considered a crucial point in the evolution of the liberal normative theory related to social order. Locke described clearly the features of social order that are acceptable to all individuals.

Like Hobbes, John Locke starts its approach from the individual. More exactly, he starts his approach from the hypothetical state in which the individual would naturally be, without any kind of political organization. Locke (2016) thinks that in the condition of nature, people are rational, independent, and in a perfect state of equality and freedom (4-5, &4-6). Even in such deinstitutionalized hypostases, the individual knows, using rationality, that he couldn't negatively affect others' life, freedom, or wealth. Also, the individual knows that he could punish anyone who does those things, as well as the fact that he could be penalized if he deviates from what is right (Locke 2016, 6, &7-8). Locke (2016) showed that this is a natural law, the one that "willeth the Peace and *Preservation of all Mankind*" (6, &7). In the natural state, everyone could use the natural law (8, &12-13). The man has "by Nature a Power, not only to preserve his Property, that is, his Life, Liberty, and Estate, against the Injuries and Attempts of other Men; but to judge of, and punish the Breaches of that Law in others" (Locke 2016, 43, &87). People are in the condition of nature when they live together, according to reason, without a superior authority, commonly recognized, able to judge and impose rules among them (Locke, 2016, 11-12, &19). Although this fact is less emphasized in the academic literature, Locke stresses the fact that living together is an expression of natural sociability (McCann 2004, 2-3).

Despite the theoretical perspective developed by Hobbes, Locke (2016) argued that living together with others is an expression of a special human call to sociability, of some innate endowments that the individual possesses (39-40, &77).

However, when explaining the emergence of social order, Locke will also incorporate the theory of conflict. It is inevitable to have disagreements among people. When some individuals, having different reasons, resort to force and attempt to subjugate others, their action leads to a state of war. “Want of a common Judge with Authority, puts all Men in a state of Nature: Force without Right, upon a Man’s Person, makes a state of War” (Locke 2016, 12, &19).

In this context, it is used the contractual scenario. Thus, as Locke (2016) pointed out, in order to avoid war (12-13, &21), in order to attain a comfortable, secure, and peaceful life alongside others (49, &95), for preserving life, freedom and property (63, &124) - the state of nature is characterized by the lack of the “*establish’d*, settled, known *Law*, received and allowed by common Consent to be the Standard of right and wrong, and the common Measure to decide all Controversies between them (...); a known and indifferent judge (...) [and the] *Power* to back and support the Sentence when right, and to *give* it due *Execution*” (63, &124-126) - using consensus, individuals agree to create a civil society (49, &96). “Wherever therefore any number of Men are so united into one Society, as to quit every one his executive power of the Law of Nature, and to resign it to the public, there and there only is a *political, or civil Society*” (Locke 2016, 45, &89).

Rational individuals, with rights and awareness of those rights, agree to create a political society for better protection of their rights than in the state of nature. The power will be illegitimate if it is used to violate the natural individual rights as it will be used against its basic purpose for which the political body was established (Locke 2016, 63, &123-124; 65, &131). Natural individual rights are the mandatory reference, preceding both the political authority and the body.

When the power is concentrated, as in the manner of political absolutism, it gives rise to the dictatorship of the ruler’s whims. Locke (2016) considered that the situation characterized

by the discretionary power of absolutism could not be considered a society: “absolute Monarchy (...) is indeed inconsistent with civil Society, and so can be no form of Civil-Government at all” (45, &90). For a better protection of the natural human rights, individuals have to leave the state of nature. However, the existence of unlimited and arbitrary power is a much greater threat to freedom, life, and property than the state of nature (Locke 2016, 45-46, &91; 69-70 &137). In accordance with this perspective, the order based on discretionary power is even inferior to anarchy. It is a serious error of reasoning to think that individuals agree to be governed no matter how, just not to (re)fall into the state of nature: “this is to think, that Men are so foolish, that they take care to avoid what Mischiefs may be done them by *Pole-Cats*, or *Foxes*; but are content, nay think it Safety, to be devoured by *Lions*” (47, &93).

Both, the emergence and the continuity of the society can be justified as long as they provide individuals with a better state than that found in the state of nature. In order to be functional and a better alternative to subjectivism, which is specific to the pre-political state, social order has to be based on universal and mandatory rules. The rule of law has to substitute the subjectivism. In this respect, “all private Judgment of every particular Member being excluded, the Community comes to be Umpire, by settled standing Rules, indifferent, and the same to all Parties” (Locke 2016, 44, &87).

The simple presence of a single center of power couldn’t ensure a superior order in comparison to the state of nature. When creating the political body, rational individuals want to obtain a good society based on “enjoyment of their Properties in Peace and Safety” (Locke 2016, 67, &134). Locke (2016) underlined the fact that discretionary power is inadmissible in this kind of society (67, &135). The power, which has to remain under the guardianship of natural law (Locke 2016, 68, &135), is compelled “to dispense Justice and decide the Rights of the Subject by promulgated standing Laws, and known Authoris’d Judges” (Locke 2016, 68-69, &136). In this context, it is forbidden to appropriate any part of the individual’s property (Locke 2016, 70, &138). “Absolute Arbitrary Power, or governing without *settled standing Laws*, can neither of them consist with the ends

of Society and Government, which Men would not quit the freedom of the state of Nature for, and tie themselves up under, were it not to preserve their Lives, Liberties, and Fortunes; and by *stated Rules* of Right and Property to secure their Peace and Quiet” (Locke 2016, 69, &137). Therefore, according to John Locke's perspective, social order constructed by the assembly of individuals should be seen as a peaceful coexistence framework based on the institutionalization of the natural law. In this context, disputes are solved using impartial mechanisms and rules. Moreover, in this respect political power is limited and controlled through different procedures that ensure collaboration and guarantee the preservation of life, freedom, and individual property.

In time, the model of liberal order will take different forms. Using the individualist scenario, based on the rationalist and contractualist perspective, several theorists underlined the importance of natural rights, while others emphasized the importance of social justice desideratum. For some, a good society would be a society based on natural rights and free market. A free market could be seen in terms of the regulatory mechanism, able to ensure (almost) all the necessary tools. For others, the good society is seen as a space of cooperation, with mutual benefits and characterized by social equity. In such a space, political power is neutral, has no cultural attachments that could promote or oppress different perspectives of the world. Moreover, we can include in our theoretical approach the scholars who emphasized the principles of the liberal social order without the constructivist-rationalist scenario.

In the first category, we included the libertarian perspective, based on the natural rights theorized by Locke: life, freedom, and property. Natural rights must be universally respected and the violations of them must be punished. However, there are significant differences regarding the way in which libertarians theorize the solution for protecting natural rights. Some authors think that the free market is a universal key for protecting natural rights. Thus, individuals could create and maintain the social order through economic agreements without the state's institutional design. Other theorists underline the importance and the necessity of the minimal state.

Murray Rothbard can be considered as relevant for the first libertarian perspective. According to this perspective, any state organization is an unacceptable affront to human rights. Rothbard (1998) stressed the fact that there is a universal and eternal human nature from which derives the natural right, the one that must be the source of the norms which are engaged in coordinating human actions (17). Rothbard (1998) argued that Locke created the first systematic presentation of individual natural rights (21). These natural rights should remain the main source for any social organization. Society is seen as a necessary tool given the fact that in isolation individual faces scarcity or the absence of the necessary goods for survival. In the absence of society, the individual is absolutely free, but rather free to die of starvation (Rothbard 2009, 654). For Rothbard (1998; 2009), a good society is a place where people are organized using the full respect for natural rights and where individuals can enjoy the benefits of mutual cooperation. These rights are reduced, as in Locke's theory, to the right of property - individual ownership of oneself and the results of his work. This is the free society, a society based on free individuals (Rothbard 2009, 182), a society characterized by the fact that "each individual is sovereign over his own person and property" (Rothbard 2009, 630). This is characterized by voluntary interpersonal relationships and peaceful cooperation (Rothbard 1998, 45). Rothbard (2009) argued that mutual interactions generate a free market that is able to preserve the social order of freedom (90-91; 1024). "The regime of pure liberty - the libertarian society - may be described as a society where no ownership titles are <<distributed>>, where, in short, no man's property in his person or in tangibles is molested, violated, or interfered with by anyone else. (...) Being in a society of voluntary exchanges, each man can enjoy absolute liberty not in Crusoe-like isolation, but in a milieu of civilization, harmony, sociability, and enormously greater productivity through exchanges of property with his fellow men" (Rothbard 1998, 41). The free society is the free market society (Rothbard 2009, 654; 1047). Rothbard (2009) underlined that the free market is in accordance with freedom and generates order, efficiency, prosperity and harmony; instead, coercion and governmental interventions spoil them (1025).

The main question is: how could be preserved human rights and social order in a free society, based on a free market? Due to the fact that political entities impose involuntary taxes, they are seen as coercive and intrusive in the field of individual property. “Defense in the free society (including such defense services to person and property as police protection and judicial findings) would therefore have to be supplied by people or firms who (a) gained their revenue voluntarily rather than by coercion and (b) did not – as the State does – arrogate to themselves a compulsory monopoly of police or judicial protection” (Rothbard 2009, 1048). Concerning the fact that economic actors could offer both defense and legal services, Rothbard has seen them in terms of other economic actors, relevant in the field of the free market. The classical arguments based on *laissez-faire* and the guardian role of the state are not convincing for Rothbard (2009, 1049-1051). Using historical examples, Rothbard (2009) argued that the competitive legal protection system, as it is produced by the free market, would be fully operational (1051-1056). For Rothbard (2009) any form of state construction is considered to be aggressive. The state will inevitably use coercion against those who do nothing for justifying it as well, so this form of political organization is considered to be immoral (Rothbard 2009, 1306). Instead, the defense provided within the free market and not outside of it protects us from the state’s aggression (Rothbard 2009, 1314).

Like Rothbard, Robert Nozick (1999) is convinced, on one hand, that all individuals are born with rights, an aspect that has to be respected, and, on the other hand, that Locke’s scenario based on the state of nature remains relevant for understanding the social organization. Unlike Rothbard, Nozick (1999) argued that “a state would arise from anarchy (as represented by Locke’s state of nature) even though no one intended this or tried to bring it about, by a process which need not violate anyone’s rights” (xi). In this respect, it is supposed that individuals could create associations to maximize their own protection within the hypothetical state of nature (Nozick 1999, 12-15). In the first phase, multiple associations for human rights protection will be established (Nozick 1999, 12-15). Then, the protection agencies will associate so that “an

ultraminimal state will occur by an invisible-hand process” (Nozick 1999, 52). This kind of state protects only individuals who pay for protection. This ultraminimal state has the monopoly of using force for protecting and guarantying individual’s rights and agreements, but, in contrast to the classical liberal approach, this kind of state offers the services of protection/punishment only for individuals who pay the required taxes (Nozick 1999, 26-27). For Nozick this is unacceptable. “It would be morally impermissible for persons to maintain the monopoly in the ultraminimal state without providing protective services for all, even if this requires specific <<redistribution>>. The operators of the ultraminimal state are morally obligated to produce the minimal state” (Nozick 1999, 52).

Therefore, Rober Nozick (1999) considered that the state construction has to stop here. What is beyond the minimal state is considered to be immoral because it violates human rights and dignity and uses people as means for reaching various goals despite their will. The minimal state should defend the right social order, characterized by respect for individual rights. It’s compulsory to acquire and preserve justice in the field of property. If someone had obtained a property, respecting others’ rights and will, he is legitimated to have it. The right society is one in which the methods of ownership functioned correctly. In this respect, property could be obtained through direct acquisition or transfer (Nozick 1999, 150-153). “The general outlines of the theory of justice in holdings are that the holdings of a person are just if he is entitled to them by the principles of justice in acquisition and transfer (...) If each person’s holdings are just, then the total set (distribution) of holdings is just” (Nozick 1999, 153). Thus, the model of social order developed by Nozick could be expressed in these terms: “from each according to what he chooses to do, to each according to what he makes for himself (perhaps with the contracted aid of others) and what others choose to do for him and choose to give him of what they’ve been given previously (under this maxim) and haven’t yet expended or transferred” (Nozick 1999, 160). This approach included the principles of the free market (Olsaretti 2004, 89-95). On one hand, the minimal state does not have the legitimacy and

resources for economic intervention. On the other hand, individual rights conduct us to free market, as a mechanism of regulating human interactions and preserving social order. Therefore, this kind of society is desirable and right: “people want their society to be and to look just” (Nozick 1999, 158).

Other liberal perspectives emphasized the role played by social justice. For Rawls (1993), social justice should be “a fair system of cooperation over time, from one generation to the next” (14), which involve not only the idea of free and equal individuals, but also the idea of a well-ordered society. Rawls’ philosophical perspective emphasized the principle of “a well-ordered society as a society effectively regulated by a public political conception of justice” (Rawls 1993, 35). In order to preserve human freedom and equality, and to be in accordance with the irreducible pluralist perspectives, the consensus is very important. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls (1993) theorized the overlapping consensus mechanism. In this regard, we can adopt the principles of justice: “a) Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all. b) Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions. First, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society” (Rawls 1993, 291).

A well-ordered society “is a society in which everyone accepts and knows that everyone else accepts the very same principles of justice” (Rawls 1993, 35), respecting in the same time the institutions shaped in accordance with those principles. At the same time, a society is well-ordered when “its basic structure – that is, its main political and social institution and how they fit together as one system of cooperation – is publicly known (...) to satisfy these principles” (Rawls 1993, 35). Not least, in a well-ordered society “its citizens have a normally effective sense of justice and so they generally comply with society’s basic institutions, which they regard as just” (Rawls 1993, 35). For free and equal citizens, the ideal society could be seen as a space for developing opportunities and advantages, not only as a framework for regulated competitions. The current

inequalities must be corrected or managed in such a way that they result in benefits for most disadvantaged individuals. Using the principles of justice, this kind of order should preserve social fairness. In order to have a good social order it is not enough to have rules that maintain a predictable and peaceful life. It is mandatory for the peace obtained to be advantageous for everyone (Dellavalle 2021, 4).

Rawls (1993) argued that it is inevitable to have pluralist perspectives regarding life in the contemporary democratic world. Taking into account these differences, if someone tries to unify society using a comprehensive ideology, “the fact of oppression” would be inevitable (Rawls 1993, 37). In order to avoid oppression, the public conception related to justice has to be only political, without any moral or metaphysical foundations (Rawls 1993, 38-39). “Social unity is based on a consensus on the political conception” (Rawls 1993, 134). The consensus shouldn’t be based on imposing the specific vision of any particular comprehensive doctrine, it will appear by overlapping different public agreements related to justice for citizens with multiple and reasonable moral beliefs (Rawls, 1993).

Using other tools than Rawls’ approach, Bruce Ackerman (1980) argued that social order could be explained by the dialogical model, centered on the need for public reasoning of the positions of power. “The liberal ideal is a social order in which *free* people act within a *just* power structure” (Ackerman 1980, 376). Social order, channels, and the holders of power are legitimated by rational dialogue. For a liberal social order, Ackerman (1980) considers that is more useful to discuss the legitimacy of the positions of power than the classical approach of natural rights postulation (6). But this discussion cannot take place under any conditions. It must be managed in such a way that no one is oppressed for asking questions; it must be logically consistent and morally neutralized, so that no one could invoke moral superiority as a discussion argument (Ackerman 1980, 4-11). Ackerman (1980) considers that this kind of dialogue will generate “a harmonious vision of social order” (231). This kind of dialogue will ensure the legitimacy of the liberal society (Ackerman 1980, 354-355).

There are multiple critical reactions against the liberal constructivist perspectives of the social order. The conservative reactions are the most known. For conservatives the social order pre-exists the individual. Thus, individuals will have the feeling of belonging to society. Therefore, most part of the individuals will aim to preserve social order (Scruton 1990, 21). Both social relationships and cohesion are more inherited than contractually created (Scruton 1990, 44-45). Despite the “illness” episodes or several malfunctions, social order is preserved and transferred between generations (Scruton 1990). Social order is what makes possible sociability, agreements, or promises among individuals (Scruton 1990, 30). In the conservative political philosophy, social and political good is validated by experience (Iliescu 2008). Tradition could be seen as a recovery tool for disturbed social order, within which are crystalized both the perspectives upon public good and legitimate public actions (Scruton 1990, 36). Tradition refers to those social practices that (a) had success in history (during time), (b) gained trust, using a credible perspective not only about what it is but also about what should be, and (c) endured over time (Scruton 1990, 42). At the same time, “society exists through authority, and the recognition of this authority requires the allegiance to a bond that is not contractual but transcendent, in the manner of the family tie” (Scruton 1990, 45).

One of the strongest sources of authority is represented by the moral order. In the moral sphere we can find the narration that gives meaning to life and creates community cohesion. MacIntyre (2007) argued that it is necessary to have both a genuinely lived morality which becomes alive within us and the tradition of virtue. Virtue is the way forward and a good social order, as it is presented in the classical Aristotle’s perspective, facilitates the individuals a good life (Aristotle 1998, 193-194, &1324a). From the conservative perspective, there is a strong relationship between social and moral order (Kirk 2004, 16; 31). For Kirk (2004), the first principle of conservative political philosophy is related to the existence of a strong, robust, and stable moral order (16). A well-ordered society is characterized by functionality and respect of moral percepts. “A society in which men and women are governed by belief in an

enduring moral order, by a strong sense of right and wrong, by personal convictions about justice and honor, will be a good society – whatever political machinery it may utilize; while a society in which men and women are morally adrift, ignorant of norms, and intent chiefly upon gratification of appetites, will be a bad society – no matter how many people vote and no matter how liberal its formal constitution may be" (Kirk 2004, 16).

There is a middle way between the liberal constructivist approach of social order and the inherited order as it is argued in the conservative political philosophy. In this regard, we can observe a kind of conservative search for the liberal social order. This kind of philosophical approach is found in Hayek's work. But the intellectual origins of this approach are much older, going back to the 17th century (Mihailescu 2022). Excluding the constructivist and contractual scenario, without believing that social institutions could be created in the absence of any previous basis, without considering the historical particularities as secondary elements, Hayek (2022) is convinced that the well-ordered society is based on liberal order and rule of law. Using the correct and universal rules and procedures that do not affect individual freedom, a spontaneous order can be obtained, which is superior in complexity to any other planned approach (Hayek 2022, 275-279). The main elements that guarantee the existence of a well-ordered society, or a Great Society, are universal behavior rules, neutral and standard procedures, and the lack of social engineering (Hayek 2022, 277). In order to have the Great Society there is no need for interventionist effort or for contractual reflections that claim to be liberating. As long as historical evolution is not affected in a negative way, it will conduct to this type of society. "The growth from the tribal organization, all of whose members served common purposes, to the spontaneous order of the Open Society in which people are allowed to pursue their own purposes in peace, may thus be said to have commenced when for the first time a savage placed some goods at the boundary of his tribe in the hope that some member of another tribe would find them and leave in turn behind some other goods to secure the repetition of the offer. From the first establishment of such a practice which served reciprocal but not common purposes, a process has been going on for millennia

which, by making rules of conduct independent of the particular purposes of those concerned, made it possible to extend these rules to ever wider circles of undetermined persons and eventually might make possible a universal peaceful order of the world” (Hayek 2022, 281-282). Political power could not impose goals or correct imbalances. The main aim of the political power is to ensure peaceful and free coexistence in accordance with individuals’ particular life style. In spite of the fact that individuals are strongly linked to the cultural field, the impersonal rules and procedures will ensure freedom within society (McCann 2004, 189-190). As a consequence, “the basic principles of a liberal society may be summed up by saying that in such a society all coercive functions of government must be guided by the overruling importance of what I like to call THE THREE GREAT NEGATIVES: PEACE, JUSTICE AND LIBERTY. Their achievement requires that, in its coercive functions, government shall be confined to the enforcement of such prohibitions (stated as abstract rules) as can be equally applied to all, and to exacting under the same uniform rules from all a share of the costs of the other, non-coercive services it may decide to render to the citizens with the material and personal means thereby placed at its disposal” (Hayek 2022, 291).

Although it exhibits significant differences from contractual liberalism, Hayek’s philosophical approach is individualist. The Great Society, theorized by Hayek, is based on individuals who respect right procedures and who take care of their lives and their choices (McCann 2004, 201-202). In this context, the criticism of the liberal perspective arises again, warning us that individualism weakens all social ties, sometimes even to the point of dissolution. (McCann 2004, 202-203). Social ties are vital elements for the good life and could be strong only in a functional community, in a framework characterized by sharing moral beliefs. For communitarianism, this aspect is regarded as one of the basic truths. The individual takes care of his own life and makes choices in accordance with his personal values and skills developed in the community and by the community. Therefore, such a community must be supported and developed, which means

that the primacy of community has to prevail over the primacy of the individual (Bell 2022; Etzioni 2014).

A good society is a right society, justice cannot be separated from good, from moral assessment – this fact conducts us to the communitarian doctrine (Sandel 1998). “For a society to be a community in the strong sense, community must be constitutive of the shared self-understandings of the participants and embodied in their institutional arrangements, not simply an attribute of certain of the participants' plans of life” (Sandel 1998, 173).

Belonging to a community is one of the basic human needs, as Walzer (1984) pointed out. This way, we obtain the important and necessary identity that provides differentiation, protecting us from the leveling of uniformity and homogeneity (Taylor 1984). There is a need for social order in which the recognition of the communitarian identity, conditioned by contemporary pluralism, should be both guaranteed and understood in its deepest meaning (Taylor 1994). In this context, cultural neutral procedures cannot be obtained, which represents the primary element of liberalism (Taylor 1994). In accordance to the communitarian philosophy, we can obtain the recognition of the multiple cultural frameworks' value. These frameworks offer individuals identity and guidelines for their development. It is obvious that it is necessary to preserve a core of values that generates social functionality and help individuals to identify the universal evils (Etzioni 1993, 157-159; Etzioni 2000, 11). Society should be thought of as the “community of communities” (52-56). In this respect, Etzioni (2000) emphasized that “a good society is one in which people treat one another as ends in themselves and not merely as instruments; as whole persons rather than as fragments; as members of a community, bonded by ties of affection and commitment, rather than only as employees, traders, consumers or even as fellow citizens” (11). A good social order is one in which everyone can live in accordance with his beliefs, formed within different communities and cultures, and that image is not deformed by unjustified public depreciations. It ensures good social order only when it is recognized the intrinsic equal value and peaceful coexistence of different cultures (Taylor 1994, 64). Taking into account the importance of the cultural

framework, the communitarianism stresses that good social order should be based on procedures that facilitate the recognition of different cultures, that support community life, prevent discrimination, and ensure a peaceful and functional society.

III.

Academic literature underlines several social order models. Using a sociological and economic approach, Dolfmsma (2009) distinguished between three models: a model based on conflict, a model of consensus, and one characterized by exchange (37). The first model was developed throughout the work of several sociologists, such as Marx, Weber, and Dahrendorf, and, in this respect, the social order is derived from state institutions (Dolfmsma 2009, 37). Political institutions manage the clash between individuals' divergent interests. This type of order preserves the balance of power relations between different categories of citizens (Dolfmsma 2009, 37). In the consensus model society, as Durkheim pointed out, is seen as an organic whole (Dolfmsma 2009, 37). Through social norms, society creates mechanisms of conformation and integration - socialization ensures the axiological consensus and social stability (Dolfmsma 2009, 37). The third model, based on exchange, presents society in terms of Adam Smith's perspective: economic exchanges. The free market allows individuals to seek their own good and to participate, even if unintentionally, in achieving the general interest (Dolfmsma 2009, 37).

Using the social psychology approach, based on social cognition and representation, we can observe both the descriptive and the normative dimensions. Regarding the citizen's perception of social order, we can argue that, on the one hand, the representation of the social order suggests "a need to grasp «what is going on» in a complex and often chaotic world, by endorsing representations that convey the impression of stability, predictability, and well-defined certainties. On the other hand, individuals are motivated to actively intervene in the organization of their political community by adopting political attitudes in line with their ideal social order" (Staerklé 2014, 50). Regarding the influence of the psychological discourse in the

field of social order, several theorists pointed out the major role played by social cognition in creating and preserving a personal view related to good order. In this respect, political psychologists emphasized the role played by the social context in shaping a personal view of society and of good social order. "There is an implicit sense that individuals of those species that have this capacity are especially sensitive to social contexts, and that this context brings into play a specialized suite of cognitive mechanisms not normally used in more mundane physical world contexts" (Dunbar 2011, 25). To explain the good social order and other social or political behavior individuals use a kind of "mental map" which plays an important role in social orientation and social assessment (Kanai et.al. 2011, 677-680; Elster 2007, 257; Van Dijk 2006). Internal factors such as emotions and cognitions are involved in generating various models of understanding and explaining the social world (Tomasello 1999, 201; Mandler 1999). Using personal motivations and intentions, individuals are trying permanently to construct the social reality mentally and to articulate it by personal values (Forgas 2001; Moskowitz 2005).

Regarding the social order, Staerklé (2014) underlines four lay conceptions: moral, economic, diversity, and structural inequalities (57-62). This fact expresses four different manners of legitimating the social order (Chryssochoou 2018, 307). These social representations have a significant impact in shaping individual political cognition and their political attitudes related to social phenomena (Staerklé 2014, 50).

Staerklé (2014) argued that the moral perspective on social order is based on compliance with established norms and values. Individuals with such type of thinking consider that the more people who respect and assume moral standards will be in society, there will be more good people and the society will be more ordered – in contrast, bad people who violate moral norms are seen as people who disturb social order and have to be corrected using institutional mechanisms (Staerklé 2014, 58).

According to the economic approach, individual interest is placed on the basis of human behavior. Therefore, competition is considered to be a norm in the field of social relations, the gain which is highly valued is proportionally with individual skills

and efforts (Staerklé 2014, 58-59). For Staerklé (2014), in this approach the social order is strongly related to the free market and the state should be seen in terms of the minimal state, a guardian who defends the success of the fair players (58-59). The main threat to social order and general good is represented by competition losers, if they want to benefit from others' efforts (Staerklé 2014, 59).

The social diversity perspective has an internal logic, based on both defense and preservation of the group identity and cultural rights (Staerklé 2014, 59). The positive thinking related to cultural differences creates premises for the social order that values cultural pluralism. In this context, rules and procedures encourage the affirmation of various forms of identity, while the state has to protect the vulnerable communities (Staerklé 2014, 60). If cultural diversity is perceived as a threat, then the members of the dominant cultural group could impose rules and institutions to protect the main culture. Particularly, social disorder is related to the emergence of foreigners and immigrants (Staerklé 2014, 60).

Regarding the structural inequality perspective (Staerklé 2014, 60-61), social relations are regarded in terms of inherited class positions and differences. In this respect, social privileges and inequalities should be managed. Moreover, all these privileges and inequalities are not only the result of individual accomplishments. Thus, social order has to be correlated with social justice (Staerklé 2014, 60). Individuals who see in negative terms social inequalities will adopt contrariant positions, advocating for a robust redistributive state; those who consider that inequalities are justified will think that all social hierarchies are right and justified (Staerklé 2014, 60-61). In this context, egalitarians are seen as the main threat to the social order (Staerklé 2014, 61).

Concluding, the paper presents several theoretical directions related to the manner of understanding the issue of social order. Concerning the historical and ideological perspectives, the paper highlights the conceptual evolution and the nexus between political philosophy and social psychology in stressing several models and social representations of the social order. Some of the intellectual perspectives of these lay

conceptions could be discovered in the philosophical models of the social order. For example, the perspectives related to moral order are met in the sphere of conservative political philosophy. The hypostasis of the free market is specific for the philosophical perspectives developed by liberal and libertarian philosophy. The social diversity model is strongly related to communitarian political philosophy. The structural inequality perspectives are relevant for egalitarian liberalism, interested in preserving social justice. Thus, analyzing the issue of social order we can underline not only the normative approach of the political philosophy concerned with finding the good world, but we can observe how ideals are shaped by political philosophy. Moreover, the study stresses both the citizens' need for political orientation and integration in the social field and the strong nexus between political philosophy and political cognition, involved in shaping or legitimating social relationships.

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Elaboration on the Systemic Abductive Method: Practical Recommendations and Methodological Foundations

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Abstract

Recently, the Systemic Abductive Method was introduced to help scholars with redefining controversial concepts in managerial, social, and behavioral sciences. This paper elaborates on the Method and its logic in relation to different schools of scientific thought and argues why the Method is pluralistic. Moreover, we suggest a set of practical recommendations based on a case study. Our contributions to theory-building include: 1) Arguing why researchers should use the terms concept, construct, and variable interchangeably. 2) Juxtaposing different approaches to conceptualizing abstraction levels. 3) Arguing systems thinking and abduction help theory building at the intersections of different schools of thought.

Keywords: Systemic Abductive Method, Systems Thinking, Abduction, Concept, Construct Clarity

1. Introduction

If scholars do not agree on the meaning of the concepts and constructs, when they report on a particular concept/construct, in fact, they are reporting on different things, and therefore, their findings are prone to be invalidated. In other words, such a particular concept/construct does not pass the clarity criteria, while construct clarity is a prerequisite for all forms of validity (Locke 2012; Suddaby 2010). Despite the importance of construct clarity, there is a gap in some social and behavioral disciplines such as management and organization regarding this critical issue, and scholars have been invited to pay more attention to it (Molloy and Ployhart 2012; Podsakoff et al. 2016; Suddaby 2010).

The Systemic Abductive Method was presented to fill this gap (Sadeghiani et al. 2022). However, the Method needs more operational techniques methodological positioning. In this paper, we aim to fill these gaps. In doing so, we 1) elaborate on the fuzziness of the terms ‘concept’, ‘construct’, and ‘variable’, which was taken as the ground for suggesting the pragmatic use of these terms interchangeably in the Systemic Abductive Method; 2) show why the Method is methodologically pluralistic; and 3) suggest some new practical techniques for concept refinement.

2. The Method at a glance

With the aim of reconstructing unclear constructs, the Systemic Abductive Method was presented based on systems thinking and Pierce’s abduction. The deliverable of this method is a constructive literature review including two main sections: 1) a critical section organized based on testing the scholars’ definitions and interpretations of a focal concept/construct against six clarity criteria; 2) a constructive part including a new definition of the nature of the concept and its application domain, what it is not, and what is not included in the application domain.

This method includes a big picture, a conceptual model presenting the relationships of the real world’s observables and phenomena, the semantic system including terms, theories, and frames, and the research system including methods, tools, and observers. This method also includes four other components; a representation of the implicit inductive-abductive reasoning logic that is used in the process of concept refinement; an explicit procedure demonstrating the research activities and steps; six construct clarity criteria controlling the critical conceptual review of the definitions and cases, and a set of recommendations.

One main recommendation is ignoring the previous scholars’ emphasis on differentiating the concepts and construct from variables. This recommendation is important because the difference between variable and construct is a commonly accepted rule in the process of defining conceptual models and nomological networks. In the subsequent section, we show why

this difference is not a rigid rule. Then, we present an example of an unclear concept and finally discuss the philosophy of the Method.

3. Theories and Terms

Theory is a hypothetical correspondence between a definitional system/framework and a set of empirical observations (Guttman and Greenbaum 1998). Theories are stated in terms of concepts, and concepts are interpreted based on experience.

Kaplan (1973) discussed three influential semantic empiricisms. 1) Logical positivism is about the verifiability theory of meaning; it emphasizes meaning as the mode of verification. It supposes a term as a meaningful term, only if it is capable of verification. 2) Operationism, as the most influential form of semantic empiricism in the behavioral and social sciences, is about operational definitions and measurement. Its concern is to specify an operation or a measure for applying a concept. 3) Pragmatism as the third form of semantic empiricism asks if meaning is true, so what difference it makes. Indeed, a term should be capable of verification, operationalization, and difference-making. Accordingly, terms such as ‘concept’, ‘construct’ and ‘variable’ should have the same capabilities in research and theory building.

Kaplan (1973) supposed four types of scientific terms to be located in a continuum from empirical terms to theoretical terms. While most scholars use the terms “concept”, “construct”, and “variable” to explain phenomena, Kaplan placed “observational terms”, “indirect observables”, “constructs”, and “theoretical terms” on an empirical-theoretical continuum. According to Table 1, these terms have been used not only overlapping but also somewhere conflicting. For example, “hypothetical construct” was interchangeably used with both “indirect observable” and “theoretical term”; or MacCorquodale and Meehl (1948) discussed how we should make a distinction between “hypothetical constructs” and “intervening variables”.

Osigweh (1989) introduced a three-level abstraction breakdown structure for positioning and repositioning the

concepts in organization science. Bacharach (1989) used the terms variable/event, construct, and concept to show different levels of abstraction. He supposed that variables are located at the lowest level of abstraction and concepts at the highest level. He believes that we should not use the terms variable and construct as synonyms because a variable is the operational configuration of a construct while a construct is a mental configuration of a phenomenon in a higher level of abstraction. Accordingly, 'construct' was defined as an abstraction of the observable categories (Suddaby 2010), and it is reflectively/formatively observed through collecting data on these observable categories or indicators (Aguinis and Vandenberg 2014; Bisbe et al. 2007; Edwards and Bagozzi 2000). Some scholars applied the term variable in the definition of the term construct (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994).

Van de Ven (2007) supposed that the continuum of observational-theoretical terms includes three terms: 1) at the highest level of abstraction: theoretical concept (e.g. organization's social structure) – that is defined in association with other terms that are not directly observable; 2) at the middle level of abstraction: theoretical construct (e.g. formalization of rules) – that constitutes indirect observable components of a concept; and 3) at the lowest level of abstraction: observable variable or event (e.g. the number and specificity of rules in job manuals) – that is the operationalized component of construct and specifies the operations needed for measurement. Considering these terms, he defined three relevant levels of theories: grand theories, middle-range theories, and operational theories. Bacharach (1989) supposed theories to be a continuum from empirical generalizations, which are rich in detail, to grand theories, which are abstract and lack observational detail. He believes that constructs are related to each other by propositions, and variables are related to each other by hypotheses.

Table 1: Theoretical Terms; Modified from Kaplan, (1973, 55-59)

	Observational Term	Indirect Observable	Construct	Theoretical Term
Reference to	Direct observation	Indirect observation	Observables	Theory
Contrasting 1	Empirical (descriptive)	Empirical (descriptive)	Empirical (descriptive)	Theoretical
Contrasting 2	Observational	Observational	Symbolic	Symbolic
Alternative Terms	Concrete, empirical terms, phenotypes, descriptive terms, experimental variables	Illata, genotypes, hypothetical constructs	Limiting concepts, auxiliary symbols, intervening variables, abstracta	Explanatory terms, hypothetical constructs
Example(s)	Dream report, marked ballot	Dream	Instantaneous velocity, frictionless engine, government	Castration complex, marginal utility, protestant ethic
Definition(s)	“Observational terms are those whose application rests on relatively simple and direct observations.”	Indirect observables are terms whose application calls for relatively more subtle, complex, or indirect observations, in which inferences play an acknowledged part. Such inferences concern presumed connections, usually causal, between what is directly observed and what the term signifies.	Constructs are terms which, though not observational either directly or indirectly, may be applied and even defined on the basis of the observables... They are definable at least in principle by observables, though in practice we may give them only partial and perhaps shifting anchorage in concreta	For theoretical terms a full definition by observables is even in principle impossible. A theoretical term has systemic meaning... This systemic quality is what makes the analysis of theoretical terms so difficult: what begins as the effort to fix the content of a single concept ends as the task of assessing the truth of a whole theory

In sum, while scholars suggested not to use the terms concept, construct, and variable interchangeably, they could not persuasively differentiate the terms from each other, trying to describe them using a continuum. Therefore, when scholars suggest clear concept categorization as a construct clarity criterion (Sudabby 2010), they should first categorize the terms they use in the construct clarity literature. Indeed, the terms concept, construct, and variable are fuzzy terms describing a continuum, and therefore, the recommendation of taking these terms synonymous not only is not an impromptu recommendation in the Systemic Abductive Method but also it is rooted in the literature of research methodology regarding their overlaps in the abstraction continuum and their states of “climbing and descending a ladder of abstraction” (Osigweh 1989, 584).

Theory formation and concept formation go hand in hand (Gerring 2012). Concepts, constructs, and variables can be seen as the building blocks of theories (Bacharach 1989). Even, some scholars take concepts as methods (Mir and Greenwood 2021). While the definition of a concept is taken as the minimal method/tool of researching the phenomenon in the Systemic Abductive Method, it also can be seen as a theory. What is discussed about the nature, depth, and application domain of the concepts in the Systemic Abductive Method is some sort of theory according to a recent typology of theories (Sandberg and Alvesson 2020). For example, Sadeghiani and Anderson (2023) defined the nature of the concept ‘pivot’ as ‘substitution’. This is a comprehending theory according to Sandberg and Alvesson (2020). Also, three dimensions of the Business Value Triad were included in the application domain of the concept pivot. While delineating the application domain of the concept helps clarify the meaning, and therefore, it is a comprehending theory, it also is an ordering theory, as the three dimensions of the Business Value Triad are three pivot types.

Our concern in this paper is not to define theory. However, as discussed, concepts, constructs, and variables are mapped to different levels of theories including grand theories, mid-range theories, and operational theories according to Van de Ven (2007) or a continuum from grand theories to empirical

generalizations according to Bacharach (1989). It also was discussed in the Systemic Abductive Method that clarity is a systemic outcome of the relationships between the concept, its definition, research question, intended observable, research tools, etc. It seems that the clarity issue of these relationships has led the theorists of theory building to introduce different typologies of theories and relate different theory types to concepts, constructs, and variables (Bacharach 1989; Van de Ven 2007). If the phenomenon/observable is more concrete, these theorists use the terms hypothesis, variable, operational theory, and empirical generalization, and if it is abstract, they tend to use the terms concept/construct, proposition, and grand theory. Similarly, while Sandberg and Alvesson (2020) introduce explaining, comprehending, ordering, enacting, and provoking theories to respectively explain, comprehend, categorize, (re)produce, and challenge phenomena, they argue that phenomena respectively referred to as more or less given out there, socially defined but more or less given, indeterminate and ambiguous, processually constructed, and constructed and reconstructed through perspectives and vocabularies. Indeed, rather than talking about different types of theories, they are talking about different types of observables/phenomena based on the level of their complexity/clarity/abstraction for the observer. In the Systemic Abductive Methods, concepts, variables, and constructs are taken interchangeable to pragmatically ignore jargon on the abstraction level. ‘Pivot’ was labeled as a dichotomous variable, and in the same way, all the concepts, constructs, and variables are supposed to be a variable in the Method. Similarly, we do not suggest different levels/types of theories such as grand, middle-range, and operational ones. Even, at the least level of categorization, two types of descriptive and explanatory questions are inter-embedded (Gerring 2012). Also, differentiating hypothesis from proposition (Bacharach 1989) is alike and it is some sort of tautology. In this regard, a comparison between the Systemic Abductive method with the extant literature was shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Different conceptualizations of the abstraction continuum

	Term	Theory	Hypothesis / Proposition
Bacharach (1989)	Concept Construct Variable/event	- Grand theories Empirical generalizations	- Proposition Hypothesis
Van de Ven (2007)	Theoretical concept Theoretical construct Observable variable or event	Grand theories Middle-range theories Operational theories	- - -
Kaplan (1973)	Theoretical terms Construct Indirect Observable Observational Term	- - - -	- - - -
Osigweh (1989)	Traveling concept/Stretched concept Generalizable nonuniversal concept Configurative situational concept/Taxonomic	- - -	- - -
Systemic Abductive Method	Variable = Construct = Concept	Theory (one level)	Hypothesis = Proposition

4. Abduction and Systems Thinking

Deduction and induction are the two common reasoning forms. The former starts with a true rule and the latter aims to end with a true rule. Abduction is an open reasoning form, in which the possibility of alternative rules is presumed (Peirce, 1878). According to of Park (2015), different scholars have studied different aspects of abduction and suggested several classifications (Gabbay and Woods 2005; Hoffmann 2011; Magnani 2009, 2011; Schurz 2008). For example, Magnani’s classification can be seen as three distinct points of viewing abduction: a) theoretical vs manipulative abduction b) creative vs selective abduction, and c) sentential vs model-based abduction. However, different classes of abduction share some assumptions, more or less: 1) the possibility of multiple alternative explanations, 2) doubt about previous findings, 3) interrelationship with induction and deduction. Despite these shared, scholars disagree on the explanatory/descriptive nature of abduction. This may root in Peirce’s definition: “Abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis” (Peirce 1974,

106). Indeed, the “process of forming” is different from the “explanatory hypothesis”, and therefore, scholars such as Gabbay and Woods (2005), Magnani (2009), and Park (2015) point to the descriptive aspects of abduction in addition to explanation. Even scholars who do not like to broaden the scope of abduction to non-explanatory abduction implicitly confess that there is some sort of non-explanatory abduction; for instance, Thagard coined the term “gabduction” for generalizing explanatory abduction to non-explanatory ones (2010). Indeed, abduction is a stage in every explanatory and non-explanatory inquiry, and scholars and philosophers conflate it with induction and similar forms of inference such as inference to the best explanation (Park 2015). Similarly, in management practice, ascending and descending a T-shaped ladder of abstraction to use abduction, deduction, and induction in the process of innovation is widely supported (Dorst 2011; Kazmi and Naaranoja 2015; Serrat 2017). In management inquiry, abduction is considered to be implicitly or explicitly a part of every inquiry, which provides first suggestions for deductive or inductive inquiries considering the active role of researchers and their cognition in forming the first suggestion (Bamberger 2019; Mantere and Ketokivi 2013). This first suggestion, which is based on surprising and new distinct facts, is widely embedded in different methodological strands of social sciences. For example, case study includes an implicit abductive reasoning process that searches for new facts. Consistently, new explicit abductive case studies, action, and other methods search for differences between cases based on abduction (Conaty 2021; Dubois and Gadde 2002; Halecker 2015; Halpin and Richard 2021; Patokorpi and Ahvenainen 2009). As an extreme methodological example, the practice lens in the social science inquiry, which is widely used in the management field under notions such as “entrepreneurship as practice” and “strategy as practice” is founded on abduction and supposes every case as a distinct case embedded in its own unique context, and therefore, needs distinct explanation (Antonacopoulou and Fuller 2020; Jarzabkowski 2004; Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009 Johannisson 2011; Steyaert 2007). Similarly, notions such as “replication 2.0” aim to replicate

previous studies not to confirm them but to find differences and inconsistencies between the studies (Tierney et al. 2020).

Consistent with Gerring (2012), the Systemic Abductive Method presumes a descriptive question embedded in every explanatory question. If we explore a ‘pivoting’ phenomenon to find some first suggestions about pivot’s triggers, we first implicitly or explicitly ask what pivot is. Indeed, we explain the phenomenon and simultaneously describe the explanation.

According to Barton and Haslett (2007, 143), “the scientific method is most usefully interpreted as a dialectic between analysis and synthesis supported by the triadic logic of C.S. Peirce, and that the role of systems thinking is to frame this dialectic.” Moreover, abduction is the logic behind the formation of the explanatory hypothesis based on surprising facts and the possibility of alternative explanations. “a variety of approaches have evolved in systems thinking that assist the abductive phase of forming a hypothesis” (Barton and Haslett 2007, 150). For example, action research was founded on abduction and open systems thinking (Barton, Stephens, and Haslett 2009).

Among different approaches in systems thinking, Singer’s process of “swiping in” is very similar to what is used to synthesize the surprising facts in the Systemic Abductive Method (Barton and Haslett 2007, Churchman 1979, 1981; Linstone 1984). Systems thinking leads the researcher to take a holistic lens; go a higher level of abstraction; see the phenomenon in relation to the other phenomena, and find more and more surprising facts embedded in the complex relationships affecting the system and its entities. Systems thinking provides a holistic standing point of viewing the reality for ascending and descending the ladder of abstraction to synthesize and analyze. While systems thinking helps researchers with better abductive hypothesis forming, simultaneously, there is a set of reciprocal touchstones, which helps researchers with interpreting systems and systems thinking via the lens of Peirce’s pragmatism (Barton 1999, 7):

- The rejection of atomistic thinking and the spirit of Cartesianism, in favor of a structure of thinking which acknowledges the existence of wholes within the context of a continuous world view.

- The pragmatic maxim and the identification of systems by their emergent properties.
- The role of abductive inference and its relation to action learning.
- The implication that a complete methodology for systems inquiry must have a way of identifying systems, the framework of ideas which in particular, express “a logic of wholes”, and a method of applying this framework to the system of interest.
- The use of symbols in the description of systems.

5. Practical Recommendation: A case

In this section, we introduce the concept ‘pivot’ as a vague case. ‘Pivot’ was first used by Ries in 2009, in a blog post, as a change in startup direction after failing in the market (Sadeghiani and Anderson 2023). Then, he (2011) defined it as a change in strategy without any change in vision. He also defined it as “a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the product, strategy, and engine of growth” in *The Lean Startup* book (Ries 2011, 149). In another definition, it was defined as “a major change to one of the nine business model hypotheses based on learning from customer feedback.” (Blank and Dorf 2012, 25) This term was first used to describe a phenomenon in the early stages of startups (Ries 2011; Blank and Dorf 2012). Then, others tried to define it as a strategic change in other contexts such as and the early history of the automobile industry (Pillai et al. 2020).

In this section, based on the findings of a critical constructive review of the concept “pivot” (see Sadeghiani and Anderson 2023 for details), we discuss how the Method’s recommendations work. Twelve recommendations were provided in the Method, which are listed in Table 3 besides some new recommendations. Based on the Method, pivot definitions and interpretations were critically reviewed using the Method’s first two clarity criteria: 1) concept categorizer and 2) delineator of the application domain. In the literature on ‘pivot’, when the scholars use the terms “a sharp turn”, “a special kind of change”, “a substantial change”, “a reorientation”, or “a revolutionary change” they are trying to define the nature of change and separate it from other kinds of change or similar concepts. Also, when scholars write “change

of ...” or “change in ...”, the rest of their phrases is about the application domain of the concept.

Accordingly, it was concluded that the nature and depth of the concept pivot is not clear because it was defined as a particular kind of change while the nature and the depth of this change were not clearly differentiated from other kinds of change such as diversification. Also, its application domain was not persuasively delineated. It was applied to strategy, business model, product, or one or more components of business model. Indeed, different scholars have applied this concept to different domains, from a change in one component of a business model to discontinuing a business and starting a new business instead (Sadeghiani and Anderson, 2023).

To discuss the roots of such vagueness in defining and interpreting the nature and application domain of the concept, we used the next four clarity criteria, according to the third recommendation of the Systemic Abductive Method: 3) context-free; 4) age-fitted 5) clear relations to the associated concepts, and 6) consistency with the overall theoretical argument. Based on the Method’s recommendation, we identified business model, strategy, and vision as the second-hand concepts and business value mechanisms (value proposition, creation, delivery, and capture) as the third-hand constructs in relation to pivot as the first-hand or focal concept. The first- or second-hand concept in this example does not necessarily concern hierarchy, level of abstraction, or inclusion. These concepts are the scope of the review (Recommendation 2).

Based on Clarity Criteria 3 to 6, we concluded that 1) pivot definitions and interpretations were confused with processual concepts (e.g. evolution vs revolution); 2) it was over-contextualized within the scope of a particular industry, early stage of the life cycle, and some entrepreneurship methodologies, and therefore, it is not well-generalizable; 3) scholars do not agree on the pivot’s relationships to the main associated concepts (i.e. strategy, business model, vision, and business value mechanisms).

To reconstruct the concept pivot, in addition to reviewing all the definitions and interpretations in the literature (Recommendation 1), we distanced ourselves from the

startups' world and transferred the concept to the everyday microbusiness and small business context and tried to conceive of a broader scope including all the literature's previous contexts and the new context (Recommendation 5). We parsimoniously redefined the nature of pivot as 'substitution', which means replacement. Accordingly, this is a categorical dichotomous variable taking only two values of yes/no. This is consistent with Recommendations 9 to 12, and the pragmatic use of the term variable instead of concept or construct. This also would resolve the divergent scale development endeavors for measuring this concept where some 4-degree and 7-degree scales being proposed regarding the unclear nature and depth of the change.

We delineated the application domain of the concept pivot as at least one dimension of these three dimensions: 1) the array of value propositions and/or target customers, 2) value production, distribution, and/or consumption, and/or 3) value promotion and capture. We also abbreviated these combinations as 1) value protarget, 2) value prodisumption, and 3) value procapture consistent with Lakoff's (2014) framing technique suggesting new terms instead of established prior mind frames. We excluded the terms business model and strategy from the definition, as they were unclear and controversial. Also, we grouped business value mechanisms into three groups according to Recommendations 4, 6, 8, and 17.

Some pivot definitions were confused with the terminology and inputs and outputs of the experimental and processual views. We deleted related terms from the main definition and discussed them according to Recommendations 7, 14, and 15. We also discussed 'pivot' in relation to 'pivoting' according to Recommendation 18. Moreover, we excluded fuzzy terms such as substantial change, major change, minor fine-tuning, etc., from our refined definition according to Recommendation 16.

Seven recommendations of the nineteen recommendations are some heuristics that arose when we were critically reviewing the pivot literature. Similarly, others may recommend new heuristics. However, the researchers may or may not apply some of these recommendations depending on

their case under refinement. Also, we suggest researchers review other scholars' recommendations (e.g. Locke 2012; MacKenzie et al. 2011; Podsakoff et al. 2016; Suddaby 2010; Zhang et al. 2016). Regardless of the recommendations that are used, scholars should pay attention to the overall explicit procedure and both inductive and abductive reasoning approaches that are embedded in the implicit cognitive logic of reconstruction in the Method (Sadeghiani et al. 2022).

Table 3: The Recommendations Set of the Systemic Abductive Method

Recommendation 1: Consider all the previous definitions of the concept and instances of the reference observable as the available data; try to reach the best explanation of the data; provide an inclusive definition rather than a distinct contextualized definition.

Recommendation 2: Specify the focal construct; list the second-hand constructs being used in different definitions of the focal construct; list the third-hand constructs being used in different definitions of the second-hand constructs. This provides you with a set of related concepts as the scope of your critical conceptual review.

Recommendation 3: Organize the critical review of the construct based on the six clarity criteria; use the first two criteria to show the conflicting perceptions and the next four criteria to show the roots of the conflicts.

Recommendation 4: Use dialectical analysis and synthesis. Analyze based on dissimilarities and categorize the concepts. Synthesize based on similarities and group the overlapping concepts in a new concept. Use both speed and accuracy of concept mapping (to the observables), as criteria for deciding the depth of categorization.

Recommendation 5: If you are defining a concept to use in a research project, conceive of the contexts broader than the population under study; distance from the context of your research, transfer your concept to the other contexts, and assure the applicability of your definition to the other contexts in addition to your particular research context.

Recommendation 6: Group and/or synthesize the conventional terms to reflect the integration of the reference observables of those terms in the new era.

Recommendation 7: List the antecedents, consequents, inputs, outputs, mediators, and moderators, and separate them from the focal construct.

Recommendation 8: Discuss the utility of the concepts and constructs being applied in the definition of the focal construct and test them against the six clarity criteria.

Recommendation 9: Do not presume general abstraction levels to differentiate concept, construct, and variable from each other. Feel free to use the terms concept, construct, and variable interchangeably with one another.

Recommendation 10: Instead of using 'concept', 'construct', and 'variable'

for difference making, use different types of categorical and quantitative variables.

Recommendation 11: In explanatory research, ask descriptive questions (e.g. is this ...? how much is it a ...? how many ...? “what ... is (are)?”) before the explanatory questions.

Recommendation 12: Consider the definition of a concept as an instrument for observing and measuring the reference observable of the concept. Imagine it as a measurement tool in operation, and try to improve its observation power.

Recommendation 13: Use conceptual models based on systems thinking to situate the constructs among other related concepts. The conceptual models should present the explanatory aspects of the focal construct in relation to the other related concepts.

Recommendation 14: Exclude contextualized terms from your definition. This helps you with generalizing and transferring your concept to other contexts.

Recommendation 15: Use negation to delineate the nature and application domain of the concept and differentiate it from similar concepts, antecedents, consequents, and mediators.

Recommendation 16: Replace fuzzy terms and qualifiers with parsimonious words as much as possible to prevent unnecessary surplus meaning and conflicting perceptions.

Recommendation 17: If the second-hand constructs being used in the definition of the first-hand construct are controversial, exclude these second-hand constructs and directly define the first-hand construct in terms of the third-hand constructs.

Recommendation 18: Discuss the focal concept in relation to its derivatives (e.g. management vs managing, organizing vs organization, entrepreneurship vs entrepreneuring) to avoid confusing process, event, state, and entity with one another.

Recommendation 19: juxtapose your new definition and the related conceptual model with the previous definitions and related conceptual models.

6. Methodological Foundations

Theory is a system of constructs that are related to each other in nomological networks as the interlocking systems of laws (Bacharach 1989; Cronbach and Meehl 1955; Schwab 2005). Indeed, “constructs exist only in referential relationships, either explicit or implicit, with other constructs and with phenomena they are designed to represent.” (Suddaby 2010, 350). Systems thinking helps researchers use scientific method, as the logical dialectic between analysis and synthesis, to give more explanation power to the constructs (Barton and Haslett 2007). Moreover, constructs have systemic as well as

observational meanings. Meaning openness results in partial and uncertain interpretations. Sometimes, a term has systemic openness, and it is meaningful only as it is used together with other terms in a system of related terms. Some terms have 'dynamic meanings', and their meanings change as our knowledge of phenomena grows and our conceptions of things are modified (Kaplan 1973).

Systems thinking and scientific thinking are twin components (Checkland 1981), and the Soft System Methodology links the systems thinking approach to behavioral science (Checkland 2000; Checkland 1989; Wilson 2001). The rationale behind this methodology is that systems thinking resolves the complexity of the behavioral phenomena. In the Systemic Abductive Method, we utilize this rationale and some related practices of the Soft System Methodology such as conceptual modeling. When we are organizing concepts and reconstructing constructs, scientific imagination matters. Systems, models, fiction, metaphors, diagrams, and computational structures are used to support the imagination ability of the researcher (Godfrey-Smith and Levy 2019). Indeed, we utilize the systems thinking rationale and tools to resolve the flaws in the mainstream reductionist approaches, based on the complementary roles of synthesis and analysis (Ackoff 2000; Johannessen and Olaisen 2005a, 2005b). We will go beyond reductionism; however, we will not be rejecting analysis, rather we utilize dialectical synthesis and analysis (Ritchey 1991).

While a remarkable part of methods of researching social systems such as action research has been developed to operationally support systemic interventions (Barton, Stephens, and Haslett 2009; Midgley 2000), the Systemic Abductive Method is a qualitative method with the aim of providing a basis for designing pluralistic systemic interventions and other research methods that are used to support explanation. Indeed, in the Method, we consider a socioeconomic system such as a business as a system with interconnected parts, emergent forms and phenomena, boundaries, and environment; and methodologically base our critical review and constructive definitions on such considerations (Johannessen and Olaisen

2005a, 2005b; Midgley 2000). This method provides a semantic and schematic representation of a phenomenon in relationship with other phenomena of the business or organization as a system in relation to its environment (Emery 2000). For example, in the case of ‘pivot’, according to Recommendation 13, the Observable Business Model was introduced to represent the business as a system and to situate the intended phenomenon among the other business phenomena (Sadeghiani 2022). This representation is a relatively more powerful explanatory tool separating the phenomena from antecedents, consequents, inputs, and outputs if it is compared to the other models and representations according to Recommendation 19. It also can explain similar models. For example, Figures 1 and 2 show the commonly used Business Model Canvas, which is descriptive, and our Observable Business Model, which is explanatory in addition to being descriptive.

Epistemologically, it is supposed that our knowledge of reality is mediated by the observers’ perceptions and beliefs. As discussed, the implicit logic of redefining concepts in the Method is dialectical abduction-induction. Therefore, the Method can be seen as a holistic manifestation of dialectical critical realism (Bhaskar 2008; Roberts 2014). Indeed, critical realism is fundamentally systemic in nature, and systems thinking lies at the heart of critical realism. Simultaneously, critical realism and systems thinking provide a philosophical foundation for the Method (Mingers 2011, 2014). According to Mingers (2011), this method shares three elements with critical realism: 1) holism: the authors went up and presented a holistic view of the coevolution of the semantic system, system of observables and phenomena, and observation system and discussed how (re)definition takes place at the intersections of these systems. 2) causality: broadly speaking, the cause-and-effect relationships between the three systems were discussed. Stricter, the recommendations on separating inputs and outputs from the construct, applying conceptual models in showing causality, and considering both descriptive and explanatory questions in the process of critical review, emphasize causality. 3) emergence: it was discussed how meaning emerges and changes in relation to the emergence,

evolution, and changes in the system of observables and phenomena and the changing knowledge of the observer. Moreover, the aim of the researcher in the Method is to discuss conflicting perceptions of a concept that is used to describe and explain a situation/reality and bring about an agreed definition. Indeed, the researcher uses all the previous definitions as the available data and synthesizes them based on dialectical abductive-inductive logic to reach the best explanation. This is consistent with 'retroduction' and 'generative causality', and according to Mingers (2014), this mode of reasoning is at the heart of critical realism.

The researcher investigates a systemic reality, and the systems concept is pluralistic and consistently dialectical (Houghton 2009). As discussed in the Method, terms, concepts, meanings, observables, phenomena, and research methods and instruments may emerge. Therefore, 'emergence' plays a critical role in the coevolution of the observation system, semantic system, and system of observables and phenomena. The emergent components of these systems are not independent of human practice. Indeed, human theories and conceptualizations as the outcome of her/his inquiry practices affect the reality of emergence. Therefore, pragmatism could be seen as another philosophical foundation of the realist interpretation of the reality of emergence (El-Hani and Pihlström 2002). Moreover, Peirce's pragmatic abductive inference which shares some forms of abduction with realist inference is used in the Method (Bertilsson 2004; Bhaskar 2013; Chiasson 2005; Lipscomb 2019; Niiniluoto 2018). Via this lens, the Method can be categorized under pragmatic realism. However, with respect to our discussion about the systemic nature of meaning and meaning openness, meanings of the words depend on how they are used. For example, to better situate the 'pivot' concept, the business model components were reorganized from Figure 1 to Figure 2 to reflect new meanings and interpretations. Indeed, the concepts and words get new meanings if their relations to the other words change. This is the main foundation on which the neopragmatists who emphasize linguistic pragmatism, build their methodology (Hildebrand 2005; Koopman 2007; Rorty 1999). Therefore, the

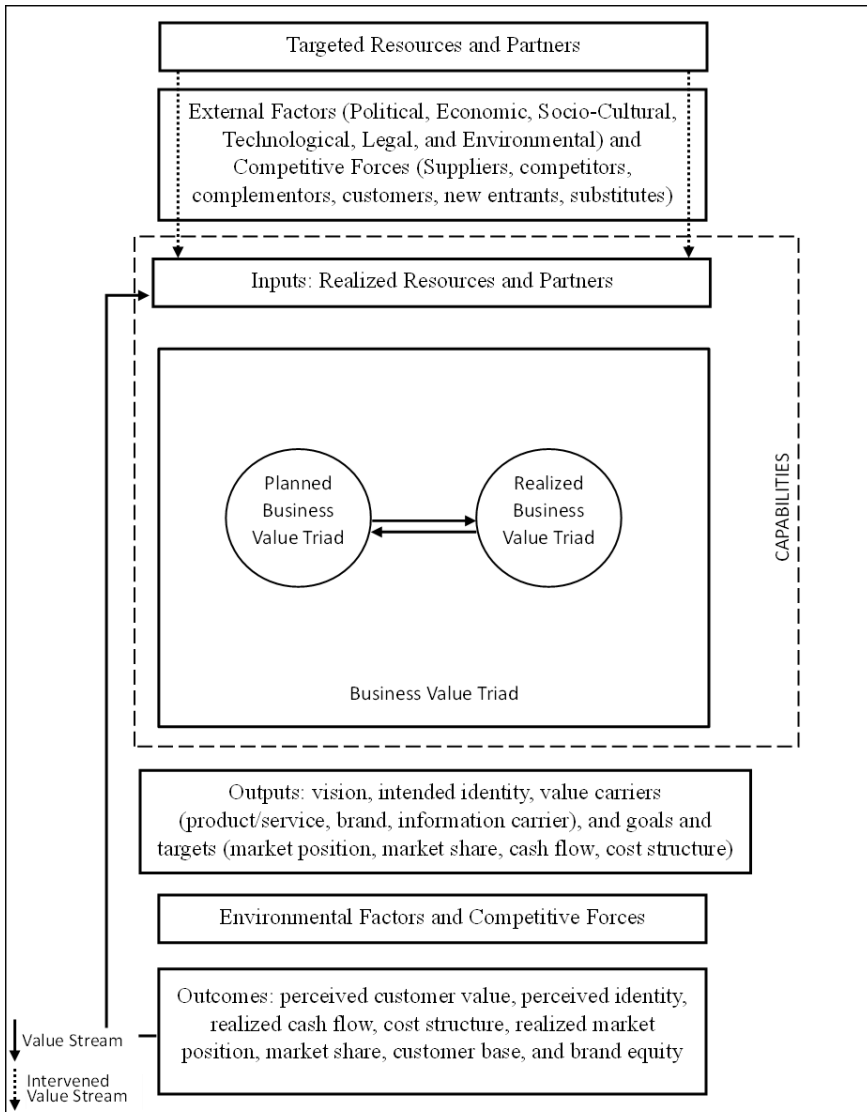
Method is not limited to classical pragmatism (Dewey 1997, 2002, 2018; Shook and Margolis 2006) and can be described under neopragmatism, too (Hildebrand 2005; Rorty 1999; Shook and Margolis 2006). The Method discussed the failure of dichotomous direct-indirect observation to explain the phenomena. This discussion and the suggestion of interchangeability of the terms ‘concept’, ‘construct’, and ‘variables’ lie at the heart of neopragmatism.

The Systemic Abductive Method utilizes Peirce’s abductive reasoning and reviews the literature with doubt but not a universal doubt. Rather, it critically builds on others who have claimed certain findings; and seeks better explanations (Anderson 2006). Moreover, this method does not oppose positivism. Because the mainstream interpretations of systems thinkers such as Bertalanffy and Simon generally fall in the scope of positivism; indeed, the Method is critical of the epistemological foundations of positivism only to better explain the phenomena but not to reject positivism (Nodoushani 1999). Also, abduction is utilized to reach a better explanation of the phenomena as a basis for positivist research methods such as experimental designs. Therefore, it also aims to empower the researchers who see the world via the lens of positivism. Moreover, it utilizes the rationale behind social constructivism to reconstruct socially constructed terms such as ‘pivot’ that come from practice to academia; and it coins new terms to disentangle the prior mind frames but not to exclude the context. Indeed, while we exclude the contextualized terms from the new definition, we do not exclude the context from the domain of the application of the concept; but open the concept’s doors to new contexts.

Figure 1: Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010)

Key Partners	Key Activities	Value Propositions	Customer Relationships	Customer Segments
	Key Resources		Channels	
Cost Structure			Revenue Streams	

Figure 2: The Observable Business Model (Sadeghiani, 2022)



In the Method, four types of dialectic are implicitly or explicitly utilized: 1) a dialectic between a priori concepts and the new concepts that are developed, 2) a dialectic between the current researcher/theorist and the researchers/theorists who are being reviewed, 3) a dialectic between synthesis and

analysis, and 4) a historical cross-age dialectic. As a research method, this follows abduction in relation to induction (Fann 2012). Therefore, it aims at inference to the best explanation (Douven 2017; Hobbs, Stickel, Appelt, and Martin 1993). To reach such an explanation, we should follow both historical dialectic and systematic dialectic of a whole system. Therefore, we observe phenomena and their relations beyond the capacity of sole analytical reasoning (Arthur 1998).

In sum, the Systemic Abductive Method is open to all the schools of thought and works based on the dialectical relationships of the schools. It does not work based on dichotomies such as positivist-interpretivist, rather it is an accumulative outcome of different schools of thought. Table 4 shows some grounds of this methodological pluralism.

Table 4: The Systemic Abductive Method is pluralistic: Juxtaposition with the schools of thought

The grounds of juxtaposition of the Systemic Abductive Method with the schools of thought**	Positivism	Critical Realism	Interpretivism	Postmodernism	(Neo)Pragmatism
Some terms have ‘dynamic meanings’, and their meanings change as our knowledge of phenomena grows and our conceptions of things are modified.					
Systemic nature of meaning and meaning openness, meaning of the words depends on how they are used.					
We will not be rejecting analysis.	*				
Coevolving of the three systems of observation including semantic system, system of observable and phenomena, and observation system (including the researcher).			*		
Three systems of scientific observation and interpretation (holism, emergence, causality)		*			
Three systems of scientific observation and interpretation (causality)	*				
The emergent components of the three systems are not independent of human practice. Indeed, human theories and conceptualizations as the outcome of her/his inquiry practices affect the reality of emergence.					*

Abduction based on surprising facts					*
The implicit logic of redefining of concepts in the Method is a dialectical abductive-inductive reasoning.		*			
Interchangeability of the terms ‘concept’, ‘construct’, and ‘variables’					*
Failure of dichotomous direct-indirect observation to explain the phenomena					*
“Develop a contextual understanding by gaining in-depth insights into the setting, while retaining a critical distance from it”				*	
The aim of the researcher in the Systemic Abductive Method is to discuss conflicting perceptions regarding a concept ...				*	
Challenging the dominant definitions of concept				*	
Suggesting a new definition of the concept based on researchers’ interpretations of the cases and other definitions			*		
** These are some grounds to show the Systemic Abductive are pluralistic. You may map a specific ground to several schools of thought as these schools are a continuum.					

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Critical Review

Kant's Multifaceted Aesthetic Legacy in the 20th Century

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Stefano Marino and Pietro Terzi (eds.), *Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" in the 20th Century: A Companion to its Main Interpretations*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2021

Keywords: Kant, Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, Aesthetic experience, Art, 20th-Century Philosophy

I.

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is one of the founding works of Western aesthetics, being among the most cited (and also most discussed) texts in modern and contemporary philosophy. Above all, the autonomy of the aesthetic dimension and its separation from the cognitive and moral spheres, the relation of the fine arts to genius, and the disinterested character of aesthetic pleasure, can be included in the elements that have remained among the most debated topics in aesthetics. The volume *Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" in the 20th Century*, edited by Stefano Marino and Pietro Terzi, aims to focus on the different readings of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* that have been offered in the 20th century, in particular of its first part. This book represents a *desideratum* in the field. Surprisingly, as the two editors explain in their *Introduction*, several studies have been dedicated to the reception of Kant's aesthetics in the 19th century, but not as many for the 20th century. Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* shows a multiplicity of aspects, being "complex, multi-

layered, heterogeneous, discontinuous and, so to speak, 'patchy' work" (p. 4). Marino's and Terzi's book has therefore the merit of bringing back this plurivocity, holding together scientific rigor and breadth of vision.

It is possible to speak, in general, of a hermeneutical approach of the book that stems from the undeniable openness of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, namely from the fact that it is not a text open to a single interpretation but rather open to multiple readings, as highlighted by scholars such as Emilio Garroni, who stated that the third *Critique* is a "thematically and theoretically non-compact book" (p. 317). Marino's and Terzi's volume follows the possible threads that unravel from this intrinsic manifoldness. In contrast to the ossified readings of Kant that characterized some figures of post-Kantianism, the underlying method of this volume can be defined as a vivid demonstration of a hermeneutical approach, highlighting the importance of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Kant's work.

Indeed, departing from the original text can actually enrich the text itself and show its new facets, in "an enrichment, a refinement and a renovation of the work itself: sometimes even little misunderstandings can be fruitful and enriching" (p. 318), without strongly diverging from the contents of the text or forcing it. Moreover, in their *Introduction* Marino and Terzi brilliantly recall that "texts are not passive items that simply lend themselves to close or distant readings, to different interpretation and more or less accurate translations. They seem to be endowed with a sort of intentionality of their own, and as such they contribute to the elaborations of concepts, images, discourses and framework" (p. 5). This is one of the merits of this book: putting into practice a hermeneutical process by letting a classic text of philosophy breathe and opening it up to new perspectives.

As the editors point out, the aim of the entire collection "is descriptive and interpretive rather than merely classificatory" (p. 32): the volume is indeed able to present the variety of possible readings and paths opened up by the third *Critique*, investigating its most challenging topics from different viewpoints, including the question of the role played by aesthetic judgments in the Kantian system, the theme of

disinterestedness, the *sensus communis*, the relationship between natural beauty and genius, and the relationship between the beautiful and the sublime – just to mention some of the most relevant ones. Especially relevant is the *Introduction* written by the two editors, where they outline the main lines of interpretation of Kant's aesthetics in the 19th century as a foundation (pp. 5-27). With their *Introduction* Marino and Terzi thus provide a fundamental root for their work, which simultaneously holds together excellent synthesis and methodological rigor, in order to show the lines of development of such readings in the 20th century.

II.

The order of the essays included in *Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" in the 20th Century* is chronological and geographic, analyzing the reception of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in the German context (neo-Kantianism, hermeneutics, philosophical anthropology, critical theory and political thought), the French context (post-structuralism, deconstruction, post-modernism), Italian philosophy (semiotic), and the Anglo-American traditions (pragmatism, art criticism, analytic philosophy) up to strictly contemporary readings with a focus on current debates concerning improvisation and Everyday Aesthetics.

The first contribution in the collection, authored by Arno Schubbach, concerns the Marburg Neo-Kantian School, in particular Cohen's and Cassirer's readings of Kant's aesthetics, showing how these relate to the systematic aspirations underlying post-Kantian philosophy. Cohen's aim is, in fact, to show how art is one of the various systemic manifestations; in doing so, he interprets Kant's aesthetics "in the narrow sense of a philosophy of art" (p. 41). Furthermore, Cohen shows how in reality aesthetic feelings are not distinct from cognitive and moral sentiments. Cohen thus establishes a connection between these different fields, stating that art begins with the objects of science and morality and then creates a new content of aesthetic experience. Unlike Cohen, Cassirer does not focus on the relationship between aesthetics and the system, but rather analyses the system within the *Critique of the Power of*

Judgment, understanding the latter not as the missing piece of the system, but rather as an evolution of the system itself.

In the field of hermeneutics, numerous philosophers have addressed Kant's aesthetics. Contrary to certain readings that tend to view Kant as the philosopher of subjectivism, Günter Figal's contribution develops an original interpretation that connects Kant's aesthetics to the objectivity of the work of art. According to Figal, aesthetic experience is only possible on the basis of a work of art and the most elaborate version of this reading is to be found precisely in Kant's aesthetics. In this vein Figal opposes an "aesthetic that is essentially objective" (p. 69) to some critiques that had been raised by influential hermeneutical thinkers like Heidegger and Gadamer. For Heidegger, aesthetics as such is characterized by a fallacious way of understanding art as a mere object of emotional experience; moreover, in the Heideggerian conceptual framework, "considerations on Kant's aesthetics are a blank space" (p. 61), since a genuine approach to Kant's work would have risked putting into question Heidegger's historically based reading of aesthetics as a reduction to an emotional object. Instead, it was Gadamer who made explicit the objection against Kant of having subjectivized aesthetics, which, for Gadamer, is a thoroughly modern fact. Gadamer links aesthetics to the concept of "aesthetical differentiation", contrastively affirming the essential continuity between real life and representation.

From a different hermeneutical point of view, Dennis Schmidt's contribution aims to show a continuity between Gadamer's and Kant's aesthetics, going so far as to argue that the first part of *Truth and Method* constitutes a kind of continuation and implementation of the Kantian project. Gadamer's intention, for Schmidt, would be to show the limitation of the *Geisteswissenschaften* based on the objectivist model of the *Naturwissenschaften* and its grounding on the basic concepts of humanism: the basis of the latter relies on the Kantian concepts of "*Bildung*", "taste", "judgment", and "*sensus communis*". However, Kant would develop his project in a direction that was later criticized by Gadamer, "as he radically subjectivizes and isolates" aesthetic experiences (p. 79). For Gadamer, Kant would therefore be the initiator of a project not

carried through to the end, leading to the denial of the cognitive value of aesthetic experience, with the outcome of the “aesthetic consciousness” and “aesthetic differentiation”, characterized by an idea of experience as *Erlebnis* that stands at the basis of 19th-century aesthetics. From this point of view, if Kant constitutes for Schmidt the starting point of the Gadamerian approach, he is also the one that most diverges from it. Gadamer, indeed, has canonized a reading of Kant’s aesthetics as the beginning of the isolation of art and its subjectivation.

Hans-Peter Krüger’s contribution is focused on the interpretation of Kantian aesthetics in the context of Plessner’s philosophical anthropology. Krüger concentrates on the 1920s and, in particular, on Plessner’s text *Investigations towards a Critique of Philosophical Judgment*. Indeed, the reflection on judgment is central to the theme underlying Plessner’s philosophy, namely the search for a procedure that makes it possible to resolve the following circle: “those standards we must always use to make judgments in research can only be generated in research” (p. 96). In this direction, Plessner reverses the relationship between determining and reflective judgments, re-functionalizing the latter for the discovery of phenomena and the invention of methods of representation (aesthetic judgment) and for gaining and explaining hypothesis (teleological judgment). This goes in the direction of a rethinking of the general understanding of the modern sciences as based on procedures that guarantee not only the foundation of the natural sciences but also that of the cultural and biological sciences by reassessing the Kantian idea of dignity.

III.

When it comes to the reception of Kantian philosophy by the authors belonging to the tradition of critical theory the focus is on the subjectivist conception of aesthetics and on its social and political implications. In his contribution Tom Huhn takes into examination various aspects of Kant’s thinking that Adorno, mostly considered as an interpreter of Hegel, reads through this influence, above all on the question of subjectivism. In fact, Adorno’s main concern is that “the objectivity of beauty is a gateway to the objectivity of subjective experience” (p. 116). An

objectivity that, however, is not opposed to subjectivity, but which “resists subjectivity [...] by installing itself between the pores of subjectivity” (p. 116). For Adorno, aesthetic experience is a historically dynamic phenomenon. Therefore, Kant’s attempt to introduce a universal concept such as that of disinterestedness results in a potential detachability of pleasure from subjectivity. According to Huhn, the limit of the Kantian account of aesthetics lies in the “objectivity of resistance” that is already found in subjective consciousness: resistance is, in fact, the element at the basis of art itself.

In his chapter Nicola Emery analyses the references to a critique of Kant that can be found in Horkheimer’s essay *Art and Mass Culture*, focusing in particular on the meaning of the judgment of taste, conceived in relation to the notions of *sensus communis* and communicability. Rather than strictly aesthetic issues, what Horkheimer sees in Kant’s theorization is the possibility of overcoming the primacy of the private sphere and opening to the other in us. With the advent of Nazism, however, “the possibility of an aesthetic community in the Kantian sense seemed to vanish way beyond the transcendental, to be historically dismissed, brutally annihilated by an aesthetic manipulation capable of saturating even all the pores of *sensus communis*” (p. 144). The impossibility of such a community, and the conflict and resistance between the individual and society, become linked to the Kantian concept of the sublime, up to the elaboration of the disenchantment with modern art, whose potential has been reabsorbed by the system itself.

Serena Feloj’s essay analyses the fundamental significance of Arendt’s interpretation of the third *Critique*. Despite certain limitations of Arendt’s reading, which ends up understanding Kant as a sort of empiricist, she re-elaborates some elements that are still central to the Kantian reflection today, such as the *sensus communis*. Moreover, from a historical point of view, her reading provided a stimulus for mid-20th-century debates, from Habermas to Gadamer to Lyotard. Arendt “defines the aesthetic community gathered around the judgment by giving up on the regulative aspect [...] in favour instead of an actual community” (p. 160). Feloj rightly recalls how the issue, for Kant, is not the call for an actual agreement, but only for the

basis of its possibility, a basis that is therefore not constitutive but rather regulative. What is at stake is thus an ideal community, not already constituted, but understandable as “a mobile horizon constantly constituting and reconstituting itself” (p. 163). On this basis, Arendt reads Kant’s aesthetics, as developed in the third *Critique*, as the foundation of his political thought. Moreover, Arendt shows that Kant’s conception of judgment is based on the human need to communicate with others, i.e. his sociality is the prerequisite for the power for judgment. Feloj underlines that, in this way, Arendt overlooks the possibility of a deduction of the rooting of judgment in common sense: the *a priori* relation between the faculties of those who are part of that community is thus missing.

Patrice Canivez’s contribution is dedicated in a very original way to Eric Weil’s reading of Kant’s third *Critique*. He focuses on the role that Kant’s aesthetics plays in Weil’s thought as the moment of transition from a philosophy of being to a philosophy of meaning. The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* represents for Weil the moment when the world of facts is reconciled with that of meanings, since the existence “of facts that are meaningful in themselves” is precisely what is discovered (p. 179). However, according to Weil, this aspect is not made explicit by Kant, due to his “conceptual language”. The beautiful and the sublime, in particular, manifest an interplay between faculties which shows their universality and shareability. What distinguishes the beautiful and the sublime from the living organism, however, is the fact that the latter is an end for itself, and not in itself (as with the beautiful and sublime). With the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* the world becomes not only knowable but also comprehensible. In Weil’s interpretation, the fact that the world has meaning implies that human action is possible in it.

IV.

In the context of the so-called French Theory Kant often plays the role of a sort of adversary, as the founder of a classical philosophical system, whose points of non-tightness must be highlighted. It is not by chance that the concept of sublime is investigated with particular attention in this context. Anne

Sauvagnargues, in her essay, discusses the fundamental role of Kantian aesthetics in Deleuze's reflection, especially in two main directions: the elaboration of a theory of the faculties (elaborating a "paradoxical transcendental empiricism") and the investigation of the role of the sublime (in his later works dedicated to cinema). Kant's third *Critique* acquires a central role with respect to the other two *Critiques*, because no single aesthetic common sense that moderates the agreement between faculties can be postulated, thus generating the need for their reorganization. The greater emancipatory freedom, in comparison to the faculty of understanding, that belongs to the imagination also allows the free play of the faculties. Sauvagnargues identifies a difference between Deleuze's book on Kant (*Kant's Critical Philosophy*), that reflects a desire for systematicity, and an article of the same year (*The Idea of Genesis in Kant's Aesthetics*), that focuses on the question of art, thus leading Deleuze to pay attention to the sublime and the dysregulation of the arts. It is precisely the concept of the sublime, in this Deleuzian reading, that forms the image that goes beyond our capacity for response and explanation, thus taking the faculties to their limits (an aspect that is scattered throughout his reflections on cinema).

Pietro Terzi's contribution analyses how Derrida approaches the third *Critique* in the essays *Parergon* and *Economimesis*, underlining the fact that Derrida's real interest does not lie in art or aesthetics, but rather in broader philosophical or meta-philosophical problems which are also affected by the critique of a peculiar situation in French culture. Derrida follows Hegel (criticizing, however, his tendency to turn art back into the circle of the system) and Heidegger (who, notwithstanding his intentions, actually remains within metaphysics) in identifying Kant as the founder of aesthetics, and thus a representant of metaphysics, insofar as he "uses" the notion of art by turning it back into the circle of the system, i.e. understanding it as the middle term between freedom and nature. For Derrida, Kant's approach ultimately highlights a practice that is present in philosophy, which relates itself to external forms, namely art, by assimilating them and submitting them to the primacy of the logos. This operation of critiquing the

limits of rationality summarizes and testifies the Derridean practice of deconstruction itself as the shedding of light on the frame and the denaturalization of the conceptual frame.

Dario Cecchi's contribution focuses on Lyotard by recalling the idea of "critical realism" which does not question the relationship between thought and reality, but rather considers it under the different perspectives of epistemology, politics, ethics, and art. It is through Kant (and Wittgenstein) that Lyotard discovers a philosophy characterized by the multiplicity of forms of judgment, linked to the various ways of making sense of experience. Kant's reflection on the sublime provides Lyotard with a favorable standpoint of judgment, because the relationship between universals and particulars is considered from an oppositive point of view. In general, what Lyotard emphasizes is that the synthesis of the sublime is not an intellectual synthesis of representations, thereby criticizing the Kantian conception. Lyotard's interpretation is uncertain about reflective judgment and thus "has quite a different purpose than the epistemological status of the object" (p. 239). This also relates to the criticism of the risk of aestheticization of politics linked to certain readings of the *sensus communis* that have been developed, for instance, by Arendt, and, differently, by Habermas and Apel.

Claudio Paolucci's essay focuses on Umberto Eco's reading of the transformation of the concept of schema from the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The latter is connected by Eco, on the one hand, to certain issues in the cognitive sciences, while, on the other hand, Eco also emphasizes the presence of certain analogies between the Kantian conception of reflexive judgment and Percian concept of "abduction". As Paolucci convincingly shows, this can eventually lead to develop the Kantian conception of the power of judgment and taste in an enactivist direction.

V.

Dewey's pragmatism also seems to constitute a direct alternative to the Kantian conception of art and aesthetics, as Scott Stroud points out. The author's intention in this contribution is to show how, behind the critique against Kant's

supposed separation of art from other human activities and his association of reflective judgment to mere contemplation and disinterestedness, we can actually see that Dewey drew some elements from Kant, although without properly acknowledging it. Indeed, for Stroud, Dewey sees Kant's philosophy as opposite to his own project, which is founded on a naturalistic basis where the organism is always understood in close relation to its environment. However, this does not exclude the possibility to highlight some aspects of commonality between Dewey and Kant when it comes to understanding the experience of the beautiful and sublime. On the basis of the four definitions of the judgment of taste, Kant stated that beauty is a symbol of moral goodness: it internalizes ends by means of experience, and this is an aspect that can also be detected in Dewey's aesthetics, in which an interconnection of means and ends is precisely identified in the "consummatory experience". Although their philosophical aims were different, Kant and Dewey seem to converge in the way in which means and ends are integrated into experience.

Diarmuid Costello concentrates on the history of the critique of Kant's philosophy as developed in the context of "arts theory", characterized since the 1980s by a rejection of aesthetic reflection and, in particular, of Kant's aesthetics. Costello analyses how this occurred via the influence of Greenberg, who had an impact among both Kant's critics (Danto) and supporters (de Duve). Greenberg reduced Kant's conception to a critique of taste, not considering him as an author that was capable to offer a positive contribution to a discourse on the arts, while Danto, in particular, sees in Kant a crushing of artistic beauty over natural beauty. On this basis, Costello highlights some of Greenberg's basic convictions, in order to show how Kant's theory must not be confused with a purely formalistic aesthetics, striving for an opening up and a rethinking of it by art theorists as well.

Thomas Teufel analyses the reference to Kantian aesthetics that are present in Cavell's thought and, in particular, in *Aesthetics Problem in Modern Philosophy*, focusing on Cavell's reading of the relationship between "what we say and what we mean". Kant's pure judgment of taste is understood here as a partial analogy with meta-linguistic statements: as Teufel explains, "Cavell centers his account around Kant's idea that in

the absence of empirical verification, the judgment of taste nevertheless speaks with a ‘universal voice’” (p. 304). The main claim is based on the fact that, if aesthetic and semantic judgments can speak with such an “air of dogmatism”, namely authority, then if our aesthetic judgments are legitimized, so too will be “the force and import of our claims about ‘what we say’ and ‘what we mean’” (p. 304). Cavell thus sees in Kant the possibility of justifying a sense of necessity in the ordinary language of meta-linguistic statement.

VI.

The volume concludes with two contributions specifically focused on the influence of the Kantian text in contemporary aesthetics, which show how the engagement with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is living and still operating today. Alessandro Bertinetto and Stefano Marino develop an original paper dedicated to Kant’s possible contribution to a philosophical understanding of “the logic of artistic improvisation”. Bertinetto and Marino stress the affinity between the fact that an improvisation always starts from a specific situation and the presence of a genuinely inventive component in reflective judgment. Thus it is impossible to refer taste to a prefixed universal rule. Indeed, improvisation is understood as a practice that must not be limited to art, but must be rather considered as an aspect that emerges in various aspects of everyday life as well. Along these lines, the two authors reassess the relationship between the power of judgment and genius, claiming that creation and performance are not just separate moments, but actually coincide in a process of self-regulation. The fact that reflective judgment does not refer to a norm implies here that it depends on the specific situation and that therefore it can be defined as “performative”. Contrary to some “Platonist” readings that demoted improvisation to imperfect practice, Kant’s legacy seems to support instead the idea that perfection is not something that can be found outside or before experience, but emerges within the latter. Improvisation is therefore an inherently transformative experience, originating in a specific situation and interacting with its surroundings. Following this reasoning, Bertinetto and Marino argue that improvisation

“makes sense (in the performative meaning of the world) the same way aesthetic (reflective) judgment invents general norms put of the single case” (p. 327). Being negotiated every time, the normativity ties in with the social aspect of art, which therefore requires a communicability and sociality that is always *in fieri*. This relates to the recovery of the Kantian concept of genius, not understood as the romantic genius, but as the creator of the work of art as he/she improvises. Normativity itself is not a prescriptive norm but is produced *in itinere*, that is, in an autopoietic way.

Thomas Leddy's essay closes the volume by opening *Everyday Aesthetics* (which has in Dewey the main author of reference) to Kant's thought. Leddy questions the idea that the multiple “objects” of everyday aesthetics would fall into the realm of the agreeable, because in reality we cannot clearly discriminate between the agreeable and the beautiful. Moreover, even the agreeable can be shared and is not merely an individual prerogative. This relates to disinterestedness, very often the focus of criticism against Kant in pragmatist studies. Again, for Leddy, drawing a clear distinction between the (disinterested) beautiful and the (interested) agreeable in the same object would be fallacious: referring to the example of a rose, “it seems that the rose could be approached either as something agreeable and as something beautiful” (p. 344). Leddy then proceeds by investigating other aspects of the Kantian conception in relation to *Everyday Aesthetics*, such as the concept of adherent beauty and that of the ideal, enacting a true pragmatist operation where opposites are rethought in a relational sense: *Everyday Aesthetics* would not be concerned with what Kant considered as the agreeable (as opposed to the beautiful) or with adherent beauty (as opposed to free beauty), but Kantian categories can in fact explain some phenomena of *Everyday Aesthetics* (such as the ideal in the case of a loved one's face). Indeed, in attempting to reconcile *Everyday Aesthetics* with Kantian thought, Leddy speaks of a development “from a thin to a thicker form of everyday aesthetics”, developing in a “multifarious” sense Kant's reflection in the direction of his project of thinking the extraordinary in the ordinary. All of this and much more can be found in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, as Marino's

and Terzi's book, in conclusion, suggest to the readers of this book.

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Bergson's biology

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Posteraro, Tano S., *Bergson's Philosophy of Biology: Virtuality, Tendency and Time*. Edinburgh University Press, 2022, 312 p.

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What biological ideas, concepts or approaches would Bergson have wanted to rely upon when developing his metaphysics of life? Or, conversely, what biological ideas, concepts or approaches would Bergson have liked his metaphysics of life to foster? To the short list of publications that have seriously tackled such questions, we can now add Tano Posteraro's recent book, *Bergson's Philosophy of Biology*.

I see three main intentions in Tano Posteraro's book. The first, already hinted at above, is that of establishing a dialogue between Bergson's *Creative Evolution* and today's biology and philosophy of biology. This provides us with a Bergson seen from the present, a reinterpretation of Bergson's main claims about life and its evolution in light of some recent theoretical developments in – largely put – biological theory. I believe this intention is admirably achieved and many Bergson scholars will undoubtedly profit from the connections established by Tano Posteraro and well as from the minutiae with which he follows the connections between theories and positions often separated not only by a century, but by a significant divergence in their methods of inquiry. The only downside I see on this particular front is the fact that some of the historical sources of Bergson's philosophy of life are inevitably left aside. If we view Bergson

from the perspective of *his* past, of his sources, then some accents of our interpretation of Bergson will inevitably change and Bergson's view might seem less progressive and less consonant with contemporary research than Tano Posteraro presents it. But this is not meant to be a critique: when, in the course of my discussion below, I point to some potential exegetical lacunae, it is merely in order to indicate to the reader that there is another side to Bergson's theory of life that needs to be kept in mind, one that is not always consonant with Posteraro's interpretation. But this does not detract anything from the latter and from the convincing way in which its first intention is carried out.

The second intention seems to be that of recentring Bergsonian exegesis around life-related issues. When *Creative Evolution* was published, it was largely seen by contemporaries (e.g., William James) as the crowning achievement of Bergsonism. However, subsequent generations of commentators tended to shift the center of gravity of Bergson's work towards issues related to consciousness (e.g., the relationship between consciousness and freedom or between consciousness, time and matter), as they were deployed in Bergson's first two major books, *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*. Tano Posteraro is part of a wave of contemporary commentators that attempt to change this tide and replace *Creative Evolution* back in the center of Bergson's by way, again, of a retrospective reading, one that sees earlier concepts and positions as Bergson's stepping stones, necessary paths for reaching the possibility of philosophically embracing the whole of life.

The third aim of the book seems to be that of providing a non-substantialist interpretation of the *élan vital*: the latter should not be seen as a vitalist principle, but as an "image for tendency" (p. 6) – where tendency is itself the allure that the virtual takes within the realm of vital phenomena – or as an image for the irreducible role of time in understanding the unfolding of life (p. 7). On the face of it, the book does not quite succeed in its attempt to fully disengage the *élan vital* from vitalism. Despite the very good analyses provided to Bergson's two main arguments against vitalism – the "fragmenting" of the "vital principle" into a plethora of organizing principles, one for each living individual (i.e. vitalism pertaining to internal

finalism), and the denunciation of the artifactual and anthropomorphic image (p. 194) vitalists have of the relationship between matter and its organizing principle in living beings –, Posteraro still comes to admit that “it may be the case that Bergson’s idea of tendency involves aspects of vitalism” (p. 195). However, I do not view this as a defeat or a failure, given the way in which Posteraro successfully carries out his first intention: if Bergson can be meaningfully connected to contemporary research in life sciences, then a Bergsonian philosophy of biology would be worth pursuing without necessarily following Bergson’s work to the letter. To put it otherwise, Bergson need not have been “right all along” in every respect; as long as at least some of his concepts may still be compatible with current research, both the critical and the heuristic aspects of his philosophy of biology remain valuable.

In what follows, I will briefly develop the above points by way of an overview of the book’s chapters. Chapter 1 (“The Actual: Mechanism, Finalism, Modality”) essentially deals with the motivation behind Bergson’s theory of evolution, namely his discontent with – and subsequent critique of – mechanistic and finalistic explanations of biological phenomena. Given that the next two chapters are mainly devoted to metaphysical issues, this is a wise way to begin, because biological issues are brought to the fore from the beginning. However, the two issues discussed here are quite different in nature: Bergson’s anti-mechanism is here synonymous with an anti-adaptationist position with respect to life’s evolution, whereas Bergson’s anti-finalism is mainly discussed here in the context of his resistance to (vitalist) inner-purposiveness in the development and self-maintenance of living individual organisms. This makes for a somewhat confusing reading, as the reader has a hard time seeing how Bergson’s opposition to an evolutionary theory and, respectively, to a developmental one could be treated together. Moreover, Bergson’s critical arguments of adaptationism and possibilism (finalism involving pre-existent possibilities) are too close to Bergson’s text to encourage the reader, despite some brief but insightful discussions of relevant concepts in Leibniz and Kant. Furthermore, much more could have been said about the evolutionary theories of *his time* that Bergson criticizes: one

could perhaps even argue that, at least to some extent, some of those theorists may have been looking for evolutionary solutions to developmental problems (see e.g., Spencer 1893 and Weismann's 1893 reply), and this could have provided good reasons for treating the two issues together. In sum, this chapter is probably the less structured and most confusing of the entire book, but the reader is rewarded for pressing on to the next chapters.

The second chapter ("The Virtual: Instantiations, Implications, Dynamics") analyzes three main facets or aspects of the virtual in Bergson's work before *Creative Evolution*. The virtual – what Deleuze taught us to regard as Bergson's distinctive modal category – is interpreted by Posteraro along the lines of a mereological theory, as a particular theory of part-whole relationships. The virtual is a "whole" that entertains specific relationships with its parts, relationships that are not characteristic of other modal categories (the actual, the possible). Posteraro identifies three such facets of the virtual. The first – instantiation – is most readily seen in Bergson's theory of pure perception from *Matter and Memory*. What we perceive is our potential action on things and this is just a selection of a complete perception that is at work in matter itself, by which each material point has a perspective on the entire universe. Our perception is thus merely a selection operated on a much larger whole, it is a mere instantiation of certain aspects of things – those that we may act upon given our bodily constitution – and does not "add" anything to reality. Implication refers to the interpenetration of parts in a qualitative multiplicity: the contraction of multiple moments in a single quality in perception, the contraction of bodily memory in habitual behavior and the contraction of one's entire past in one's present, with each passing moment. Finally, the most original part of the chapter is the idea of "dynamics" or "dynamical interaction" (inspired from Bergson's discussion of innovation in "Intellectual effort"), the idea that each actualized perception, behavior or attention act reacts on the whole which is contracted in it and brings with it a reorganization of that whole: a failed attempt to solve a problem helps us rethink the problem itself, the possibilities of my body revealed by perception help open new

possibilities – and hence new perceptual insights – by way of action, repeating a bodily operation helps us refine the motor scheme that we use to perform that very operation etc. Explicitly discussing this third facet of the virtual – its “dynamical” nature – is not an insignificant contribution of this book. The only shortcoming of this chapter is perhaps the fact that the author does not problematize Bergson’s granting an important role to possibility in perception, given that “instantiation” is an aspect of the virtual that Bergson opposes to the possible – like Bergson in the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*, Posteraro uses in the first section of this chapter the terms “virtual” and “possible” as interchangeable terms, and this is a tension in Bergson’s theory of perception (and, more generally, of consciousness as hesitation and choice) that still awaits its clarification.

Chapter 3 (“A Discourse on Tendency”) introduces the central notion of Posteraro’s interpretation of Bergson, that of “tendency,” which is seen as the development of virtual multiplicity after *Matter and Memory* and into Bergson’s theory of life’s evolution. The first iterations of this notion are followed in Bergson’s earlier writings, but it is in “Intellectual effort” and *Creative evolution* that the notion comes into its own. Tendencies are qualitative multiplicities: no tendency exists alone, multiple tendencies coexist within each tendency, and the actualization of a tendency is its dissociation from others. Tendencies are, as by their names, not passive, they tend to actualize themselves, they have directionality without specified purpose. However, their actualization maintains the whole from which the actualized tendency has dissociated itself or, to put it otherwise, actualization is a form of coexistence, a “modus vivendi” as Bergson puts it, of a dominant tendency with those it was coalesced with before the actualization and which also contribute to the form the actualization takes. The last section of this chapter distinguishes Bergson’s theory of tendency from Anjum and Mumford’s (2011) notion of disposition, a discussion that is perhaps less useful than it promises to be and that could have been reduced to the main differences: that, unlike dispositions, tendencies are part of an interpenetrating whole, so that they may only be analyzed separately after they are actualized and that tendencies are essentially temporal (not static) in that they

retain their past – the whole out of which they have dissociated themselves – and actively impel towards their future actualization (p. 130).

Chapter 4 (“Individuality and Organization”) opens the most important part of the book. Spatialisation and temporalization are interpreted here as two opposing tendencies, the tendencies whose ideal end-points (though inexistent, because they are mere abstractions) are space and time. These tendencies form various modes of coexistence and some of our main categories (matter, life) are, in fact, not substantial realities, but modes of coexistence in which either spatialization (for the case of matter) or temporalization (for the case of life) is the dominant tendency. Spatialisation is analyzed into three aspects, namely isolation (of a system from others) that is only indicated in the material world itself (in the form of non-homogeneity of the material continuum), externalization of parts (each part may be seen as external to the others, once the system is isolated) and, finally, localization (in a neutral, abstract or absolute grid-like space: once the parts are externalized from each other, the possibility of its decomposability is presupposed to have pre-existed this operation, and that preexistence is neutral space itself). Living systems, on the other hand, exhibit a tendency towards temporalization that has three facets that are strictly opposed to those of spatialization. Rather than being a form of isolation, individuation is a self-organizing movement that Bergson interprets in thermodynamic terms as a resistance to – or rather a delaying of – entropic decay. The “interpenetration” of parts is interpreted as the unity that traverses the developmental processes that make up an organism: the intricate structure of an eye, with all its diverse, precisely arranged components may be seen as an almost impossible organ to build if we assume the parts to be external to one another; but if we regard the developmental processes by which some initially undifferentiated cells form the eye in a unified and simple – though temporally extended – process of differentiation, the “parts” of the eye can become exterior to one another only after they will have diverged from a whole they were initially interpenetrated in. Non-locality or duration is finally interpreted as the metabolic self-maintenance of

organisms and this metabolic activity that holds together the whole organism is interpreted as the foundation of lived time.

The developmental interpretation given to Bergson's discussion of the formation of the eye as a "simple" act is, I think, one of the most original parts of this book. It elegantly opposes the mechanistic predisposition of seeing the eye as the eventual result of putting together infinitely small parts in a manufacture-like fashion and the Bergsonian move of remounting towards the past, towards the source of the eye's unity in the initial undifferentiated cells. Of course, an evolutionary explanation is also required and, from an evolutionary perspective, some of Bergson's idea that we see *despite* our eyes is lost in Posteraro's discussion of the issue in chapter 5 (p. 214).

Chapter 5 ("Finalism inverted") comes to Bergson's own theory of evolution. The chapter begins with an interesting distinction between the metabolic (individual) scale and the evolutionary (reproductive) scale, and the tension between two registers – the impulse towards the creation of new life forms and the tendency towards stasis, towards least effort and self-preservation that is expressed when these new forms are actually formed – is interpreted as an *apparent* contrariety due to our applying an evolutionary scale as a frame for metabolic phenomena. I see this as an interesting attempt to mitigate the Lamarckian element in Bergson's view of evolution, namely the idea that adaptation is a side alley, rather than the main highway of evolution and that the main directions of evolution have to be grasped not at the scale of individuals, populations or species, but at the level of the main macroevolutionary directions towards which life evolves (see Jeler 2022). Ultimately, I believe that Posteraro's insightful attempt to reduce this Lamarckian element is unsuccessful because Bergson locates the tension not between ontogenetic and phylogenetic phenomena, but within phylogenetic phenomena (it is species – and not individual organism – that turn away – at least in part –, in their formation, from the impulse that led to this formation (see Bergson 1944, 113-114, 142-143). It is therefore no wonder that, in this chapter, Lamarck is reduced to the theory of the transmission of acquired characteristics: while this may have

been a frequent move in the neo-Lamarckism of Bergson's time, a deeper influence of Lamarck makes its presence felt in Bergson's view of life and Posteraro's interpretation makes no room for it. Another shortcoming of the chapter is the marginalization of Bergson's hypothesis that it is through directed variation in the germ cells of the individuals of a species – seen in a saltationist way – that the impulse towards the formation of new forms of life is manifested. A very brief mention of a few recent publications leaning towards directed variation is done in this chapter, but Bergson's thesis should have been analyzed more closely in light of today's scholarship on the issue. After a discussion of Bergson's relationship to Theodore Eimer's theory of orthogenesis, Bergson's theory of the *élan vital* is interpreted as an inverted, external finalism. Inverted, in the sense that it does not postulate goals to be achieved, but it consists in a harmony among divergent lines of evolution, a harmony that is explained by the common, initially undifferentiated origin of these tendencies, rather than by a common end they would attempt to realize. External, in the sense that, unlike the inner-purposiveness of vitalist theories, it holds that the impulse that unites the individual organisms and life forms is external to them and is to be found in the evolutionary progress of the whole of life as a unique, simple movement.

From the point of view of philosophy of biology, Chapter 6 ("Canalisation and convergence") is perhaps the richest and the most provoking of the entire book. It analyses Bergson's main argument against the neo-Darwinian views of the omnipotence of selection, namely the existence of convergent organs or traits in very different taxa that diverged before these organs or traits first appeared (e.g., the camera eye in vertebrates and mollusks). The analysis shows that, against Bergson's conviction, cases of convergence do not automatically refute theories of the omnipotence of selection (p. 225). However, conceptual tools from contemporary evo-devo theory are then used to show that Bergson's view on convergence – namely, the fact that it presupposes the retention of the same tendencies from a deep, common evolutionary past – are, at least to some extent, compatible with today's views. Highly conserved gene toolkits

that control the development of organisms are responsible for convergent traits across different taxa, while environmental factors or selective pressures merely provide the occasion for these structures to form. Of course, for Bergson, both the organs or traits themselves and the genetic complexes governing their development are actualizations of the virtual tendencies of life that await the occasion for their insertion into actual life forms, i.e., for their divergence and dissociation (p. 234). Bergson's view thus seems analogical to current evo-devo views, but identity between these positions remains out of the question. However, the connections outlined by Posteraro here are surely worth further exploration.

I am however less convinced by the final idea of the chapter, namely that the more a tendency is actualized, the more it becomes likely to be actualized in different taxa. This suggests that "dynamic interaction" – by which an actualization returns to modify the virtual whole that engendered it – could operate at the level of the whole of life, as if an actualized tendency in one taxon could remount the evolutionary course and affect the actualization processes in other bifurcations of the tree of life. How the appearance of the eye in one clade or species could, in itself, promote its subsequent appearance in another species or clade remains unclear upon reading the last part of the chapter. Moreover, this idea seems to rest upon Bergson's views of a "sympathy" between different forms of life that is based on his theory of the fundamental unity of the "whole of life," but, by Posteraro's own admission in the concluding remarks, the discussion of issues related to sympathy is left for further work. The relatively minor critical points made *abi* are not meant to deny the great merits of this reading of Bergson. This book should – and certainly will – heavily influence the scholarship on Bergson's philosophy of life, hopefully pushing it towards an even closer dialogue with scientific research. And it might also influence the way we see Bergson's philosophy *tout court*.).

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Book Review

The Genealogy of Paradigm Shifts: For a New Aesthetics

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Oana Șerban, *After Thomas Kuhn: The Structure of Aesthetic Revolutions*, De Gruyter, 2022

Keywords: aesthetics, art, paradigm shift, rational model, Kuhn

The publisher: De Gruyter or 270 years of academic publishing. De Gruyter is one of the world's most prestigious publishing houses, specialised in academic publications. In 1749 Frederick II of Prussia granted it the royal privilege of printing books. From 1919, Walter de Gruyter (1862-1963) succeeded in merging the publishing house with four other major publishing houses, forming Verlag Walter de Gruyter & co. (1923). Since then, De Gruyter has been publishing reference academic works in fields such as linguistics, scientific monographs, multimedia publications, as well as extensive bibliographies in these areas. As an independent academic publishing house, De Gruyter publishes annually 1,500 volumes and over 16,000 articles; 200 books and 500 articles are available for open access, and authors who wish to publish with this publishing house have at their disposal a very detailed and explicit guide, *‘How to become an author with De Gruyter.’*

The author: Oana Șerban, a lecturer at the University of Bucharest, is part of the new generation of Romanian scholars who are highly appreciated nationally and internationally and, needless to say, also a De Gruyter author. In 2022, her book, *After Thomas Kuhn: The Structure of Aesthetic Revolutions*, was published by De Gruyter, but more importantly, this work was how De Gruyter chose to celebrate 100 years since the birth of

Thomas Kuhn and 60 years since the first edition of his work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*:

“The cooperation with De Gruyter is one of the greatest honours that I had in my career. As a book author, you invest much time and dedication to your research: years of reading, study, revaluations, advocating different perspectives and disseminating them at conferences, and engaging feedback in conceiving new arguments, more reliable, more critical, hopefully indestructible. De Gruyter took care of my book by all means: I had the joy to work with a professional editorial team: they created not only a competitive editorial product on this occasion, but also a long-lasting project that I am proud to see embraced by such publishing press. My joy is that they found a place for this book in their powerful philosophical tradition. The greatest news is that this book appears at the 100th anniversary of Kuhn's birth and the 60th anniversary of the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*! It is the perfect occasion to track down the hypotheses that convinced the American philosopher that paradigm shifts in the arts are worthy of more systematic consideration”, said the author. (Oana Șerban)

The work: Regardless of the approach you take towards Oana Șerban's volume, whether you do it as a novice, for conceptual awareness and rigorous understanding, whether the reading occurs under the specialized lens of an aesthete or epistemologist, following the consistent sources and references, or whether the reading becomes a rather didactic/methodological one, one firm conclusion appears to be irrefutable: *After Thomas Kuhn: The Structure of Aesthetic Revolutions* is, above all, a praise of the method. The author's 'invisible' aims are to organise, reconsider and update previous theories that have attempted to explain and broaden the Kuhnian hypotheses regarding the world of art. In this way, Oana Șerban outlines the philosophical frameworks through which a foundation could be established for a new aesthetics and a new criticism for art in general and for contemporary art in particular. Her analytical approach is in equal measure genealogical, phenomenological and hermeneutic.

The work comprises: 1) an extensive introduction on the enigmas of progress and predictions in science and art; 2) six chapters, in which the Kuhnian hypothesis on the similarity

between the structure of scientific revolutions and the structure of artistic revolutions is analysed, from its origins to its effects; 3) some summarising conclusions and 4) a remarkable “reference”. Each chapter may be considered as a stand-alone research piece.

The book is built around the following questions: how can we address the issue of rationality and truth in art and aesthetics by inspiring ourselves from scientific perspectives? Are artistic styles akin to scientific paradigms? “Can *paradigms* in science and *masterpieces* in art be considered rational models”? Is the concept of “paradigm” in science equivalent to that of “style” in art? Why is Thomas Kuhn relevant to the world of art and how exactly does he become relevant to contemporary art? Can cultural revolutions be explained in the same way as scientific revolutions are?¹ “What are the possibilities through which concepts from science such as *progress* and *predictability* can be borrowed to study the evolution of art and aesthetics?” “Historically, are science and art equally influenced by politics.” From a historical perspective, do science and art equally experience political influences? All of this in order to verify whether the hypothesis of commutability of the structure of scientific revolutions in art can be supported and what are Kuhn's merits in decoding certain aesthetic validity criteria necessary to discuss about cultural revolutions. Analytically scanning the six chapters of the book *After Thomas Kuhn: The Structure of Aesthetic Revolutions*, the following conclusions can be noted, by which Oana Șerban (2022b) supports the thesis of equating the structure of scientific revolutions with the structure of aesthetic revolutions:

1. Cultural revolutions are “packages” that can be reduced to an aesthetic revolution and the artistic manifestations it entails. The aesthetic element becomes reducible to the ideological content of a revolution, and the artistic element reducible to its forms of expression.
2. Aesthetic paradigms are represented by artistic styles.
3. A revolutionary aesthetic paradigm insinuates itself in exactly the same way that a scientific paradigm imposes itself: it claims to either identify the solution to an outstanding problem within the dominant paradigm, or to provide a radical and complete alternative to new problems for which the dominant paradigm no longer offers satisfactory solutions.

4. If in terms of scientific revolutions, the paradigm shift is accompanied by radical social transformations, in art it is the political factor that determines the duration of dominance, the timing of the revolution and the nature of the changes.
5. Distinctions arise from the perspective of the revolutions' structure not at the level of the mechanism that produces the changes, but at the level of the understanding of the notion of progress, which, for the world of science, will always be cumulative, and for the world of art, non-cumulative.
6. If in the world of science paradigms exclude each other, in the world of art, they can coexist and are not incommensurable.
7. In order to explain the duration of a dominant paradigm, it is necessary to articulate a theory of aesthetic validity, which explains the time validity of a paradigm in terms of its norms, values and adherence of its principles regarding the socio-political problems existing in a particular time frame, specific to a cultural "ethos".
8. The nature of change, as well as that of progress, in arts and aesthetics is linked to temporality.
9. The temporality of a work of art is authentically connected to the temporality of a revolution: the validity of a style is conditioned by the validity of a paradigm prescribed by a cultural revolution.
10. The notion of style characterises artistic revolutions.
11. The notion of paradigm is attributed to aesthetic revolutions.
12. Artistic revolutions and aesthetic revolutions are dominant components of cultural revolutions.

These are the final answers of the author to the questions she put forward. From the *Introduction* of the volume we learn that Thomas Kuhn's interests in the world of art are not peripheral. In fact, in the first manuscript of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, available in the Kuhn archive at MIT, Thomas Kuhn considered the comparison between the image of science and the image of art as the most appropriate way to announce his project: changing the image of science by bringing it closer to the image of art. Although the published version is very different from the original manuscript, this appeal to the

history of art is not merely occasional in Kuhn's works and allows us to understand his controversial retrospective statement that the *Structure of Revolutions* was in fact a “belated” product of his discoveries through parallel analyses between science and art. In 1969, in his comments on Everett Hafner's essay, *The New Reality between Art and Science*, Thomas Kuhn concurred with Hafner's conclusion: “The more carefully we try to distinguish artist from scientist, the more difficult our task becomes.” (Kuhn 1969, 403). However, the only reason why art and science seem so similar is that we lack the appropriate tools to distinguish them. Oana Șerban supports this thesis regarding the commutability of the structure of scientific revolutions in art and retraces the entire history of debates on this topic, using the concept of *aesthetic validity* in such a way that she effectively sustains with arguments the idea that “politicized art undergoes paradigm shifts, although these patterns prove to be more cyclical than linear.” (Șerban 2022a). Thus, she analyses Kubler's model (in the second chapter) which proposes incommensurability between science and art; she constructs the concept of aesthetic validity (correctness and veridicity) based on Everett Hafner's theories, who suggests that art and science become commensurable as long as the spiritual element is taken into account (Chapter III). Additionally, the following themes are also rethought and reformulated in the fourth chapter:

- a. possible discussions about progress in art; the comparison between the linear and the cyclical progress;
- b. “revolutionary” artistic innovations;
- c. the end of art in Hegelian terms;
- d. Bortolotti's thesis on the impossibility of really questioning progress in art;
- e. Doorman's thesis in which he postulates that the discussion about Kuhn's paradigm of incommensurability negates the thesis of progress in art.

Willing to give as much consistency as possible to the notion of *aesthetic validity* that the author explores, the ideas of Remi Clignet, for whom the aesthetic codes and paradigms are creators of cultural capital, Habermas' concept of pragmatic communication or the Heideggerian “double”, truthfulness-correctness, are also proposed as reinforcing arguments. Șerban does not forget to discuss, in line with the views expressed by of

Foucault, Erjavec, Ranciere, the eloquent example of the paradigm shift produced by the artistic avant-gardes through their political role.

The most complex task that Oana Șerban identifies in her attempt to support her position is that of rejecting conventional hypotheses that propose the incommensurability between science and art. A possible mediator would be aesthetics, through which the classical objective-subjective binomial can be relinquished. In this case, the constitutive hermeneutic relationship of the three domains becomes the saviour.

In the last chapter, Oana Șerban blends between *styles* and *paradigms*, which she assimilates as complementary facets of cultural revolutions, with styles attributed to artistic revolutions and paradigms to aesthetic revolutions (p. 204). This approach should be at the core of any radical change, understood as a paradigm shift, which equally involves understanding the necessity, predictability and ideology that produced the change. Thus, artistic revolutions are material manifestations of aesthetic revolutions (p. 89) or phenomenological projections of the artwork at the level of aesthetic perception through which art becomes a true manifestation of the Spirit. (p. 89). Oana Șerban grants art the power to record human progress as a whole through its infinite objects, forms and practices (p. 106) and acknowledges the ability of art to provide the means for new experiences of historical time. As Doorman mentions the Renaissance demonstrated that “people wanted (and believed they could) achieve what was best faster” (p. 107). She characterizes Doorman's notion of artistic revolution as having three features: “necessity, understanding, and effective outcomes adjusted to social expectations.” (p. 107). In the end, Oana Șerban notes a weakness in all the views because they fail to satisfactorily incorporate art and politics, which she considers a central feature of art since the avant-gardes (p. 202). Her thesis links aesthetic validity to the changes determined by the political influence on the artistic act: “the concept of aesthetic validity is based on the political accents embodied by artistic representations corresponding to a dominant paradigm.” (p. 211) “Archaeologically, the distribution of the sensible operating within each aesthetic paradigm, ensuring the transition from a dominant paradigm to a newer, revolutionary paradigm, retrieves the immanence of these conditions of possibility and,

implicitly, connects art with community and reciprocally with politics.” (p. 212). When criteria of validity, correctness and aesthetic veridicity are applied to genealogical determinations, they produce criteria for the perception of aesthetic objects and their appropriate interpretations; whereas when applied to archaeological determinations, they generate criteria for historically perceiving aesthetic paradigms and correctly interpreting the “contingency between political practices and artistic praxis.” (pp. 215-6).

After Thomas Kuhn: The Structure of Aesthetic Revolutions is a complex synthesis that presents the theories of numerous art historians who have either adopted or rejected the idea that artistic revolutions are as important as revolutions in science. The initial questions are not left without well-reasoned answers. Perhaps more insight could have been brought to the initial thesis if, in what concerns the substitutability of the structure of scientific revolutions to the structure of artistic revolutions, a critical approach to paradigm shifts in the perception of the works of art had been considered, in other words, it would have been useful to comparatively examine how paradigms of reception modify and transform and what factors influence this profound aspect of the presence of beauty in our lives. From my point of view, and using a metaphor, I hope an appropriate one, reading Oana Șerban's work is like listening to a jazz concert in a cathedral. As for the methodology, the way in which the author combines the research methods, from the hermeneutic ones (genealogy, archaeology) to the phenomenological approach, in order to support with a variety of references her working hypotheses, remains exemplary.

Of greater philosophical interest is the way Șerban takes Kuhn's five criteria that define a scientific theory and employs them in the world of art. A theory must be

- (1) Precise – it should lend itself to empirical tests in the realm of art;
- (2) Consistent with other theories dedicated to progress and change in art;
- (3) Have a wide range of applications;
- (4) Simple, and
- (5) Fruitful, able to “expand our knowledge of artistic paradigms, aesthetic revolutions and their intimate connection with the

patterns of paradigm shifts prescribed by the history of science". (p. 16)

Instead of conclusions... However, what was really Thomas Kuhn's view of paradigm shifts in art? He tells us, in the *Essential Tension*, that great works maintain their value over time, even when they face revolutionary changes in style; Picasso's success did not cause Rembrandt's works to be cast into the shadows of some museum repository. Although the Kuhnian model cannot be said to have been accepted as particularly relevant to the arts, it cannot go unnoticed that when it comes to the language of aesthetics or philosophy of culture, analysing and discussing about paradigm shifts or cultural revolutions has become a common practice. Also, Kuhnian concepts and terminology are more readily embraced by the meta-artistic rather than scientific/epistemological discourse. On the other hand, where Thomas Kuhn really failed to find an answer is "where do bold and revolutionary ideas that bring about paradigm shifts come from?" The artists themselves became his allies, trying to answer this question in a personal key.

According to James Rosenquist, some ideas burst explosively in a moment of enlightenment, in the middle of the night. Rosenquist is one of the most creative contemporary artists, who, alongside with Warhol and Lichtenstein founded Pop Art in the 1960s. Taking up Kuhn's question, Rosenquist has created a series of sculptures and paintings on the theme of *The Origin of Bold Ideas*. For him, there are no paradigm shifts, but rather "paradigm breaks". In 2007, he presented a sculpture entitled *Idea in Middle of the Night*². The artwork, composed of three oil on canvas figures, is exhibited at Acquavella Gallery, New York. In *Figure 1a*, the pencils piercing the light bulb symbolize the hands of a clock and writing an idea that crosses your mind in the middle of the night. *Figure 1b* presents a painting entitled *Idea, 2:50 A.M.* The light bulb is the light that suddenly sparks in the creator's mind in the early hours of the night, like an intellectual alarm clock. The light bulb is also the light necessary to capture any fleeting inspirations before they fade away. In the painting from *Figure.1c*, titled *Idea 3:50 A.M.*, the light bulb represents the beginning of an idea that explodes in so many directions that it becomes an abstract version of itself

and eventually transforms into something entirely new – like a paradigm shift (cf. also Goldstein 2012).

Other artists, such as the Italian sculptor Giuseppe Penone, tell us that a great idea is formed in a slow and gradual process of crystallisation, similar to the one that takes place in the formation of a rock. Penone is an Italian artist whose works are outdoor installations in which bronze carved trees are integrated into nature in a thematic manner. The same thesis is shared by contemporary aestheticians such as Estelle Zhong Mengual and Baptiste Morizot (2018, 79-83).

Therefore, wherever science proposes incredible solutions, it supports art in making them visible.

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After Thomas Kuhn: The Structure of Aesthetic Revolutions lays the foundation of a new art criticism, based on the redefinition and recontextualization of the concept of aesthetic validity and directly affirms the necessity of criticism, and therefore of an aesthetics, for contemporary art.

NOTES

¹ Kuhn himself considered as a great step in his research the successful attempt to find valid ways to extend the theory and structure of scientific revolutions into the artistic and cultural area (1969, 403-412).

² *Figure: Instant idea formation*, James Rosenquist. Cf. Bancroft (2007): (a) *Idea - Middle of the night. Light bulb, pencil and electrical wiring on painted wood*. 7 1/2 x 12 x 12 x 12 inches. (b) *Idea-2:50 A.M.* Oil on canvas. 57 x 44 inches. (c) *Idea-3:50 A.M.* Oil on canvas. 63 x 49 inches. Exhibited at Acquavella Gallery, New York, NY . (<https://laskerfoundation.org/paradigm-shifts-in-science-insights-from-the-arts/>).

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Review of *Broken Theory*

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Alan Sondheim, *Broken Theory*, Punctum Books, 2022, 226 p.
<https://punctumbooks.com/titles/broken-theory/>

Keywords: Testimony, being, anxiety, thinking, practice, phenomenology

Mandelstam wrote on “the awareness of a minute’s power”, which almost certainly stands for a minute’s power of awareness. Sondheim expands this minute towards the limits of logical and syntactic structures, establishing language as rather a studio, or a room, than a home of being. This temporary residence belongs to someone else, furnished for the purposes of others. Perhaps, language is burglar: it breaks into the residence – the apartment – of being. How much can it carry?

“Reading itself becomes suspect” – but we’re not sure if writing is, since everything writes with whatever is available. Writing is – out of necessity – honest, open, bottom line of thinking. On paper, digital or otherwise, claim coincides with the truth behind it. Writing cannot be verified without addressing facts that are reflected by writing. Facts, in the meantime, are not there: everything changes in the process of writing, as if writing itself was changing this – was the change. Sondheim’s agenda is the agenda of outside, his writing is *on* the world. His speech strives to reach the other side of the “blank wall”, the other side of paper. Bunin wrote “Everything is within me, and I am within everything”, but this transition never goes smoothly. Language and reality communicate in a manner that resembles Morse code. Sondheim reveals

procedures of thinking in their technical side, frames thinking on the run, captures a thought that is unready to end. What would be the end? Sondheim gives many parallel structures, as lists, giving us a hint: end of a thought is a verbal pattern. Only way to reach the other side of the wall is to keep a phrase – a thought – unready, and Sondheim redirects his thinking outside.

To be *on* something means to be on the surface of something, but this is not the case with *Broken Theory*: it's rather about being on the verge of something. World is on tip of the tongue, and vice versa. In the meantime, thinking is in the meantime: *Broken Theory* starts from the middle (with analyzing a corpus of texts), "thinking through the world", inhabiting the enormous, densely inhabited space. "That is inconceivable... that anything can be said", one would add – that anything *still* can be said, have a solid floor – a ground – to be claimed. The book sums certain things up, but if summing up outlines shapes or borders of phenomena – it sums nothing up, it adds to the already uncertain boundaries of thoughts and events.

The book is an event, a case: unframed and uncovered, it proceeds through pages and chapters, rooting itself deeper into the inconceivable initial experience. Sondheim writes: "Does experience always translate in text?", while he's making each text an experience: this is important. Does an experience translate into another experience, does it persist, and to what extent? While concentrated on elusive, transparent and invisible states, texts in *Broken Theory* are very focused on their subjects; this focus is rooted in concern and anxiety, and more – urgency of the matter. If this book is a testimony, it's a strange testimony, written from the middle of experience and coinciding with experience. Text *is* experience – sometimes interrupted, often vague, but each time – vital. In a way, text spirals deeper into its own syntax, but this doesn't spare it from the surface – the world that the text is on.

Being breaks into language; pages are holey with meanings. Text is a texture – background for the losses. In the meantime, marks both precede and outlive their meanings. Our birthdays are prescheduled for years when we'll be gone – Sondheim's Birthday in year 5000 will be Monday (mine – Tuesday). Likewise, there were Birthdays before the birth.

People share their temporariness with meanings. Meaning remains human.

Words remain human. Human remains.

Sondheim's writing is subject-oriented phenomenology. Unlike object-oriented "long lists" by Harman, Bogost and others, his lists are often lists of losses: "destroyed villages, torn flesh, mutilated faces". Like some of his texts (for instance, the one that ends with "m" instead of "me"), these lists seem to have no end - both abrupt and endless. End is technical: it's not supported by urgency within a mechanism. End is the outer necessity, being breaking into the textual. End shapes all that precedes: "what is visible has been killed".

Body is text: "the body is a collocation of scars". Body is texted. Body breaks into, and is broken into: "This is a form of giving, this devouring". This exchange is internal, and it constitutes economy of drama – written coinciding with the read, output of experience matching with input in terms of its value, but not quite – in the essence. "Blank wall" of living is balance between the felt and the written. This balance is never complete, and – negotiating continues: Broken Theory contains dialogues, and, in broad sense, acting. Enactment: slices of code, commands, words to execute rather than describe. Bottom lines of writing: writing-presence.

Matter is retained by writing in a form of writing, loss is retained in a form of loss: *Broken Theory* reclaims practice

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Interview

Squatting Critical Theory: A Conversation with Rahel Jaeggi

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Abstract

Rahel Jaeggi is one of the leading figures of contemporary Critical Theory. In November 2023, she visited Argentina on occasion of the celebration of the I National Conference of Critical Theory, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt am Main. In the present interview, which was conducted during her days in Buenos Aires, she engages in a productive dialogue about her biography, the development of her work, her account of social critique, the current state of Critical Theory, and issues related to capitalism and colonialism.

Keywords: contemporary critical theory, Frankfurt School, critique, Hegel, philosophy of history

At the beginning of November 2023, Rahel Jaeggi visited Buenos Aires to participate as the keynote speaker in the I National Conference of Critical Theory. Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt am Main, this event aimed to bring together scholars and activists from Latin America and around the world to reflect on and discuss the complex relationships

between Critical Theory of society and a Global South country like Argentina. As is well known, the funds needed to establish the renowned Institute at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt in 1923 came from the Weil Family's business in the field of agricultural trade, based in this South American country.

At the Conference, Jaeggi not only delivered a lecture on the standpoint of emancipation but also participated in a decentered dialogue between the Global North and South, seeking to address the past, present, and possible futures of Critical Theory. As part of this unique dialogue, we had the opportunity to interview her and engage in a conversation about her biography, her work, her notion of social critique, the current state of Critical Theory, and the issues of capitalism and colonialism.

First of all, we would like to ask you a biographical question. How and when did you start becoming interested in philosophy in general and Critical Theory in particular? Which thinkers were influential at the beginning of your intellectual life?

R.J.: Those are complicated questions because it all started very early. I was 14 years old when I dropped out of high school. And I was part of a social movement in Berlin, the squatting movement, which at that time was very powerful. We had 150 houses that were squatted, and it was not just a matter of people secretly squatting; they actually lived in them. It was really a huge movement. I became involved in this movement, I moved out of my family house, and drop out of high school. But it was not only about the houses, not only about the right to the city and gentrification. Gentrification was not even much of an issue. It was also about living together in a different way. The kind of confrontation that was aimed at was radical. It was about changing everything. The habit was that every time we just squatted a house, we would also publish shorts statements telling people what we wanted there, and so on... We said: "it is not just about this house, not just about housing in the neighborhoods. The next step will be to squat schools, to squat everything, factories," and so on...

In which city was that?

R.J.: In Berlin. This threw me into a totally different kind of life, of course. I did not go to school anymore. I was 14 years old. This explains how I came across different kinds of philosophers. One thing I remember is that we had a group of support for prisoners. A lot of people we were living with ended up in prison. So, we had this group and at some point someone suggested: “oh, there is this guy Foucault; we should read Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment*.” We actually read Foucault in the group. Of course, we also did practical work, as it is always the case because this movement was not very theoretical. That was the point when people said: “it is not worth to argue about the last footnote in Marx, we should do something.”

When exactly was that?

R.J.: Early 80s. So, the movement itself was not theoretical; there was no one who would have thought that one should first read books or agree upon like a theoretically well-founded position. That was the period when everyone was somehow fed up with the radical left of the seventies. There were a lot of struggles about theories that led to nothing. This was the assumption that the autonomous movement then had. It is just about *doing, let’s do something*. So, not everyone was interested in theory. But some people in our group were, and started reading Foucault in order to understand what we were even doing or what kind of an institution the prison is, and so on. Since I am not so much of a Foucauldian now, it is interesting that that was actually one of the first philosophical books I have read and...

R.J.: Was it already translated into German?

Yes, yes, everything was translated. Foucault was already sold on the streets. We had this tradition of selling illegal copies. Foucault was very popular back then.

R.J.: It is interesting that you needed to study theory because of a practical issue, because of a practical conflict.

As I said, I did not go to school. One of my very good friends in the community I lived in was an on and off student. He started to study philosophy. Then he gave it up because of all the things we were involved in. Sometimes, I attended seminars without being a student. One of the really influential books for me was *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which I studied intensively. And then I even started to read Freud, Weber, Nietzsche, and Marx in order to understand that book. I have to confess that I only read *Odysseus* because of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There were a bunch of books I needed to read in order to understand *Dialectic of Enlightenment*... That was another formative thing for me. Then, at some point – and this was rather late – I studied Marx and *Capital* more seriously. There were huge lecture classes at the University, where everyone could come. But we also had a little group that was part of the more political scene in which we also studied *Capital*. Then, one of the classes I took was on Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, which had a deep influence on me.

At a certain point, I decided I wanted to make a degree, that I wanted to study. As you know, all these movements have ups and downs, and I was involved in a lot of things. I was also working in a movie theater as a projectionist. And at a certain point, I just realized: “okay, I am not going to do this for the rest of my life.” That was something very common in our scene. But this was of course a way of life that was somehow dependent on the fact that rents were so low. People could do this. But, anyway, I did not think that this would be sustainable at the long run. I really thought I should find something I should do, something that I was really interested in. And I have always known that I wanted to study philosophy. So, I decided to take an external exam at high school. I mean, I did not want to go back to school because I really hated school; I did not want to have anything to do with it. There was the possibility to just take an external exam. And this is why I am a big fan of libraries because they are my way to get discipline, which is not so easy if you live the kind of life I was living back then. What I did was to just go to the library every morning. There, I found people who knew a bit more about the stuff I had to learn, like math and physics, and so on.

At this point, I read a lot of Hannah Arendt, almost everything she wrote. I am also very much of a Hegelian. I studied Hegel seriously, and also Marx. But Hannah Arendt was the only author I was always involved in. I read all her letters. For some reason, I was also interested in her as a person. And then, when I first studied philosophy, I also focused on Hannah Arendt and wrote my MA thesis on Arendt and Heidegger. Hannah Arendt was also the reason for reading Heidegger. So, this is how I first came across Heidegger. One should read Heidegger in order to understand what is at stake with Arendt, and I did a lot of Heidegger then. I have never taught it since that time. This was some of a weird mix and, I would say, there is still some of that mix in my thinking. I have not written about Hannah Arendt for a while. But I did publish my MA thesis as a book and I wrote some articles on her. I am sometimes still invited to Hannah Arendt conferences. It is not so much like openly in the focus of my thinking, but I would still say there is this a strong influence by Arendt at work.

You have written and published four monographs, right? Welt und Person, about Hannah Arendt, from 1997, Alienation, that was your PhD thesis, from 2005, Critique of Forms of Life, from 2013, and there is this new book, Fortschritt und Regression...

R.J.: Out in December, finally... I read the second run of proofs while I was in Vermont a couple of weeks ago, and now it is in print.

Could you tell us how your ideas changed or evolved from one book to the other?

R.J.: My Arendt book ends with a chapter on alienation in Marx and Hannah Arendt. And then, I decided to write a book on alienation, which does not discuss either Marx or Arendt that much. I discuss Heidegger and Marx, actually, but very briefly. However, I decided to do it in a completely different way, which does not focus on reading the classics. But still, the issue of alienation was already of interest to me when I wrote the last chapter of the Arendt book. I was interested in

the way Hannah Arendt misunderstood Marx. She misunderstood a lot about his concept of labor, and so on. I took my cue here from the fact that she said: “yes, Marx is focusing on self-alienation, but it should be alienation from the world.” She has this idea of world-alienation. I think Hartmut Rosa uses it as well.

Yes, he uses that idea in his book Resonanz.

R.J.: The concept in German is *Entfremdung*. And it also implies an “alienation from the world.” And then I thought, “okay, in one sense, she is right.” However, she is also wrong. The young Marx speaks of alienation in labor and from the products of activity, and so on. It is alienation from the world because work is the productive world, productivity. So, she is totally wrong. And I think she then only referred to the young Marx. In another sense, however, she is right – the idea of *Entäußerung* is the idea that what I see in the product of my own labor is not me, albeit it should be me. In Hegel, it was with respect to the realization of spirit; in Marx, with respect to the realization in labor. Then you might think: okay, if it is about the world, there is still a philosophical flaw in it because of the lack of the idea of action, which for Arendt was so important.

Here, pragmatism already came into my thinking, at least because of this interesting idea. What I take from Arendt here is that there is something you cannot predict, that is not just an outcome of what you intentionally plan, but is still something you relate to. The chapter was of course not only short, but also I did not know all these things. However, I thought there is something to Arendt and her proto-pragmatist critique of Marx. I was sure that Marx’s idea of alienation here holds in some way. And that one should somehow integrate the idea of action. And also, of course, the political. This was very much an issue when I wrote all those things. I mean radical democracy, like Laclau and a lot of neo-Marxists who would go against the assumption of harmony, the assumption that one could somehow overcome conflict in a certain way...

Behind the idea of alienation in Marx, there seems to be this assumption...

R.J.: Even the ideas of emancipation and alienation were somehow affected by this assumption. “Once we overcome alienation, we will live in a perfectly stable world...” My clue to the idea of political actions comes from Hannah Arendt, but I am a bit more critical about what some people did with it. However, the Arendt part in it is still something I found important.

And my next book was on alienation. In the alienation book, I tried to figure out how one could conceive of alienation without falling into the trap of essentialism and of a powerful self-transparent subject – the personal individual subject, or society as a subject. My work took a different turn somehow. I mean, even when I started to write my PhD thesis, I did that kind of exegetic work. I wrote like hundred pages because I was just trying to work myself through the classics, to connect Heidegger and Marx in some way, something a lot of people had already done before. At a certain point, I knew that was not going to work for me. I really needed to develop a new take. So, that was *Alienation*. Alienation is some kind of self-contradiction of liberal modernity. I think the promise of autonomy, of self-determination, is just systematically undermined.

But what is the normative criterion here? Why is alienation bad? Since in modernity we are all very fond of autonomy, this is a contradiction of modernity, and this is enough for criticism. In order to do more than this kind of what later on I called an internal critique, as against immanent critique, one needs to be able to criticize the form of life as such. I mean, the form of life of modernity. Or one should be able to define it in order to do more than just saying “okay, autonomy is a fact of modern lives.” This gives us enough ground to follow up on all those contradictions or undermining tendencies. So, in *Alienation* there is already the idea that to go further, one would need a critique of forms of life. Toward the end of *Critique of Forms of Life*, actually, there is already some talk on progress. What is a good form of life? It is a rational form of life of some sorts, namely, certain kind of accumulative learning

processes. And in a very modest way, one could call this progress. So, the next book is on progress.

The book on alienation was really inspiring for us because, in our academic field in Argentina, the concept was considered outdated as a consequence of all the criticisms of the 20th century. We also think the notion of alienation has a critical potential to study our current situation, especially new forms of subjective suffering...

R.J.: This is the reason why I started this alienation book and decided to do it from scratch. That is, to be somehow eclectic and to use this and that from analytical philosophy. When I first started to write this dissertation, everyone – I mean, I was a young PhD student back then – would say: “This is so outdated. How can you do this?” “you know, we are liberals now and alienation is a comprehensive doctrine that cannot be defended, and neither the idea of the good life...” The others would say: “we are post-structuralist now, we have abandoned the subject, what are you talking about?” So, that was really a difficult situation. No one was interested at that time in figuring out whether there was a useful concept of alienation in Marx. And I totally believed this was the case. Nowadays, many people write, for example, on the concept of *Gattungswesen*, species being. There is a new interest and people now dare to confront these issues.

In Potsdam, for example...

R.J.: In Potsdam, of course, but also everywhere. So, I think now it’s the time to work through Marx and Hegel. When I wrote the book, it was not the time. In order to even make a point or do it as an intervention, it was important to look at it in a new way somehow.

In academic terms, Alienation was your PhD thesis and Axel Honneth was your supervisor, right?

R.J.: Yes, he was my supervisor.

And this was at Frankfurt?

R.J.: Yeah, this was at Frankfurt. I mean, I had this position as a *wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin*...

We were thinking that the exercise that Honneth did with the idea of Verdinglichung is in some sense similar...

R.J.: Yes, it came out practically at the same time, but my PhD thesis was many years before.

2005, right?

R.J.: Yes, but I submitted the dissertation in 2000. By the way, with respect to all this, we can tell the story this way but it is also kidding because it is also somehow really arbitrary.

We can go to the next question – this is a long one. One of the issues that runs through your work is the nodal question “What is critique?” We can find this question in your book co-authored with Robin Celikates on social philosophy, as well as in the collective volumes you have co-edited with Tilo Wesche and Daniel Loick, and likewise in your works Alienation and Critique of Forms of Life. Especially in the latter, it seems your answer is decisively the model of immanent critique. We want to ask you about its philosophical grounding, especially its relation to the Hegelian category of “determinate negation” and to the question of historical dialectics in general. One could say that your recent reflections on the relation between moral progress and regression in history are also informed by a Hegelian-pragmatist reading of radical historical change. Could you share some methodological reflections on this discussion, so relevant in the history of Critical Theory, from Adorno to Honneth, as well as on the way criticism relates to history?

R.J.: It is a very good substantial question, and a very complex question as well. So, first of all, yes, I do. Somehow everything revolves around immanent critique, and I do defend a certain version of it. For me, it is very important to make this distinction between what I call mere internal critique and

immanent critique. You could also translate it into internal critique and, let's say, a Left-Hegelian kind of critique. But the interesting point here is that both share the idea that one should take the criteria for critique from within the social formation. Internal critique somehow trusts, let's say, the inherent normativity of a certain community and then somehow points toward the way they do not fulfill their own normative commitments. For this, you need not only trust but also a community with normative commitments that, at the same time, are good or emancipatory. So, there is a problem with this kind of internal critique, which a lot of people defend. It is the first step to take in many situations. I think Michael Walzer is one of the most prominent examples here. I also refer always to Oliver Stone, the filmmaker, who, in my view, is an internal critic. But, for me, this is too conservative, albeit not in a political way. I know that most of the people who practice this kind of critique are not conservative. I mean, Michael Walzer is not a conservative. But this is not a transformative critique. Of course, people have to rethink their normative commitments while realizing they do not fulfill them. The basic idea is: "you are defending human rights, but you let people drown in the Mediterranean," or: "you treat the refugees badly, even if you are a committed Christian." The idea is that one should somehow bring the institutions and practices, and the normative commitments together. However, in days of Trump and of your guy here, Javier Milei, some people are just cynically trying to bring norms and social practices together by giving up the very norms. A radical transformation is not in sight. So, I think immanent critique is a different kind of thing, and a lot of people mix them up. I mean, even Adorno. When you look at where he talks about immanent critique, you would find what I call internal critique. He is not conceptually consistent in this regard. It was not so important for him.

When you talk about this, you have in mind the liberal-communitarian debate, right?

R.J.: Yes, this is more or less a communitarian idea. So, immanent critique differs from the kind of critique I have just spelled out. First, because it seeks the systematic

contradictions within a social formation. So, it is not just: “okay, you only pay lip service to something and you should be more honest.” It is about deep-seated, systematic contradictions, a systematic way of not fulfilling one’s own commitments. It is about norms that are not just not fulfilled in a certain society but also, at the same time, somehow conservative. My main example here is the way Marx deals with freedom and equality in the bourgeois capitalist society. This is what I spelled out in my 2009 paper on ideology for the first time. The interesting thing here is not that bourgeois capitalist society only talks superficially, ideologically, about equality and freedom, but the fact that it is based on exploitation. The interesting thing about bourgeois capitalist society is that freedom and equality do play a conservative part. I mean, you would not have the double-free labor market in capitalism without the idea of a contract, a labor contract, which is based on the idea that people are somehow persons, independent, free, autonomous enough to even enter a contract...

It is a practical realization of the principle...

R.J.: It is a practical realization, but at the same time, it contradicts the very idea of freedom and equality. This is the kind of immanent critique, of ideology critique, I am interested in. I would say that even in the camp of immanent Left-Hegelian criticism, there might be two versions. I would not say two camps within the camp, but two versions. One is more positive, more interested in what Axel Honneth calls a reconstruction, a normative reconstruction. We share that we think positions are somehow rational. It is not just a contingent norm that shows up. You can go for the more positive reconstruction and look for the ways in which those justified, reasonable norms are already working in a certain social formation and work with this. What I prefer is maybe the more Marxian version. It depends on how you interpret Hegel. I would say Hegel is a crisis theorist as well. But you could also have this positive view: “Let’s try to figure out where reason is already in history, and this is where we work from.”

The other reading is the more negative way – there are contradictions, there are crises, there are tensions, there are

things that cannot be easily resolved. They are part of the structure and not just some random thing that will be solved in the long run. So, this is a more transformative mode of critique, and here the differences between the communitarian or internal way of critique come to the fore. This critique is transformative. In terms of immanent critique, you cannot solve the problem without transforming the whole formation. In order to live up to freedom and equality, it is not just that some people have to finally be a bit more serious about their norms, or some institutions have to be remodeled in order to live up, in Marxian terms, to the bourgeois ideas of freedom and equality. You have to transform the very norms. I mean, you have to have a revolution practically, which also means that the norms themselves will not just remain the same. This is the kind of immanent critique I go for.

In short this is an idea of immanent critique based on a crisis critique of society, which focuses on the negative aspects, on the way things do not work, or run into problems and enter into crises and contradictions. The foundation of critique then is a bit different. It is not a set of things we hold on to and we can defend as reasonable. It is more like the negativist way to go through unreason and history. I mean, the way in which, in capitalism, *Sittlichkeit*, the Hegelian ethical life, is distorted. It is there but in a distorted form. This kind of approach takes the burden of being related to some idea of philosophy of history. Let's say there is a transformation process in which institutions and social practices evolve, erode, and are being transformed because of a crisis dynamic.

So, this approach has to commit to some kind of, let's say, social theory that would take the narrative of a learning process – or of a Hegelian determinate negation. In some way, what I am doing is to spell out, once again, the idea of determinate negation. The dialectical negation, and also the idea of contradiction, so important here, is a very strict and demanding concept. I tried to inject some air into it. I mean, if you ask yourself what is a practical contradiction, there are different versions of it. It is not easy to spell out what it is. Perhaps not always this very strong idea of contradiction must be present. I connect it with the pragmatist idea of problem-

solving. I translated this idea into the dialectical process of experience led by determinate negation. And, at the same time, I leave some space for, let's say, a not so purely immanent contradiction. It brings in the idea of innovation, or the idea of political action, or contingency. So, I tried to spell out a concept that is not teleological in the bad way, led by a problem-solving process that is somehow away from those crises and problems. I mean, this is what I defend in the progress book. However, I would not buy into a very rigid idea of learning process. I open it up for a variety of functional equivalents to solve the question of how contingency comes into the picture without buying into "the everything is contingent" idea, which I find weak.

When you translate the logical dimension of the determinate negation into the practical realm of political action, it is inevitable not to think of the question of contingency, and the question of the new and the new beginning of actions. In your work, the pragmatist question of experimentalism gives us a tool to tackle this open dimension...

R.J.: Yes, exactly. I think those learning processes are not to be understood as just the unfolding of a principle that is already there. The very lazy reading of Hegel always accuses him of doing this. I mean, Dewey accuses him of doing this too. Even in Hegel, this is not the case because in the process of realization something happens. I find it interesting the way he conceives of the world-historical individual as someone who does the new, who is innovative, who has to come up with something new in order to change things.

And I would even say Marx's proletariat is somehow the world-historical individual because, in Hegel, this world-historical individual acts according to what is needed now, what the time needs. So, the proletariat is somehow the medium for a historical tendency – the crisis situation of the day. The proletariat translates this into some kind of action. But the action itself, I mean, whether it shows up, whether the proletariat is able to form this kind of collective class consciousness needed to enter class struggle, also depends on contingent matters and the contingent solutions you come up with for those problems in the crisis. There might be a variety

of solutions. Each of them leads to a different path. I think of this giving a bit more weight to contingencies, and also maybe to the fact that not every contradiction might lead to a crisis, which then leads to the kind of conflict needed to overcome the crisis. Sometimes, there are things that have more power than a strong contradiction.

What are your thoughts on the present situation of Critical Theory of society? We are curious about your general opinions on the current landscape of this centenarian tradition of thought, considering the various contributions made since Axel Honneth's crucial intervention, both in Germany and around the world. When we mention "Germany," we are encompassing not just Frankfurt but also, of course, what for example you are doing in Berlin. Similarly, when refer to the "world," we mean not only the cores of capitalism but also its peripheries.

R.J.: I think there are some obvious challenges for Critical Theory. It starts from the ecological crisis and the relation to nature, and it extends to the post-colonial situation, the relation to the Global South, and so on. There is not only the question of how to criticize capitalism, but also of how to lay some conceptual groundwork. In economic terms, how to conceive of the economy and the relation between economy and society, and this question cannot just be answered by going back to some kind of Marxism, which I am fine with. I am also interested in some fundamental systematic issues here. Of course, we should figure out financialized neoliberalism and the technological transformations we are going through. We need an idea of how this works and how this affects our lives today, and so on.

But there is also something it is about time to challenge – economic theory, at a more basic level. And this is a very hard challenge because since classical Critical Theory, economism has been a bad word. There are not many people who have enough knowledge. I am even criticizing myself. This is something that has been abandoned somehow. Of course, for a couple of years already, there have been some powerful voices in Critical Theory who discuss this. You might not realize this,

but like with alienation, the concept of capitalism was out of fashion as well. So, I remember the first talks I gave about capitalism and ways to criticize it, and I remember when Nancy Fraser started to talk about capitalism again. There was a liberal tendency, or then, again, a new post-structuralist, Foucauldian tendency, which would talk about regimes of a different nature, not about capitalism. So, it was not easy to even get back to the critique of capitalism. The thing is that Critical Theory as such is a critique of capitalism, and has always been that. When you look at the first generations, when Adorno writes about culture industry, even in his aesthetics, he gives a critique of capitalism of some sorts.

However, with the exception of some more or less forgotten figures, no one has actually engaged with the economy. Economy as economy. This was somehow led by Lukács and the reification thesis. It was always about how the economy affects the life-world. So, even before Habermas came up with the famous system/life-world distinction, there was somehow the tendency to focus on the way economy affects society. Economy was then seen as an alien part. The focus was on how it takes over society, on how it distorts forms of life, or does not. I try to take on another perspective that sees economy as a part of society, which is also normative. This is a point some people have made, that Habermas was wrong to see the economy as part of the system that is not normatively imbued, and so on. I think Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* did some harm to the situation. It is a great book and, in some way, the last book in Critical Theory that came up with a comprehensive and impressive social theory. However, he then left this field. So, he was criticized for the system/life-world distinction, but then he stopped working on it. And he went onto political philosophy, democracy theory, and so on.

So, the gap is not just about the economy. The other gap is social theory, and we still all hold on to the idea that what distinguishes Critical Theory from some kind of, let's say, left-wing Rawlsianism, is that a social theory or theory of society is involved. The stakes were high here. I think here, again, we have somehow a lacuna. There is also the idea that "there is no such thing as society as a whole, but only a set of conflictual

groups.” But there are people who somehow hold on to a Marxist theory of society. I think a lot of debate will be needed.

However, you were probably talking about political challenges. There are obvious political challenges, but there are also some theoretical-conceptual challenges here. It is about establishing a serious discussion about critiques of society, economy, and the question of nature. I find this interesting because a lot of Critical Theorists today would say: “yes, this is something we have to do or that we have failed to do,” as Axel Honneth said in a recent conference. But you can see that already some Critical Theorists are doing it. I do not want to be dogmatic with respect to Frankfurt School Critical Theory, and then also with the first and second generation, with the Left-Hegelian part of it. Well, maybe I am somehow dogmatic, but at the same time, it would be good just to spell out how Critical Theory, Frankfurt School, Left-Hegelian Critical Theory, has a very specific contribution to all those topics. And sometimes the stakes might be so high that you do not want to go through with it because, for example, you do not want to have the burden of a heavy theory, philosophy of history or something. Or you do not want to have the burden of a very expensive idea of reason. But at least we should try, with respect to the tradition, to spell it out, and to figure out how to reconstruct it and then confront it with critical theories in the plural sense.

I mean, there is some kind of lip service sometimes paid, like: “okay, so now we should integrate postcolonial thinking into Critical Theory; we have to do this with critical philosophy of race, feminism, and so on.” And I do think this is important. I mean, this is an idea of relation. Relation means that there are two distinguished positions that then are related or connected to each other, but I do not think it is good to just give up some things. I mean, when Marx says Critical Theory should always be part of the struggles and wishes of the age and also, of course, of the theoretical struggles and wishes of the age, I think it is important to see this as an attempt to be a critical partner here. Not only to say: “okay, so everything that goes on that is vaguely good or left” should be integrated.

The same holds, for example, for the idea that now we need a new concept of nature, and you should kind of reflect on

our relationship to nature. Some people say: “yes, Critical Theory has not done much on it”, which somehow is true, especially concerning the Kantian turn. Kantianism does not give itself easily to thinking about nature. But look at *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In that book, there are so many good resources for thinking about it. And what I find interesting is that they already had this. Or, at least, they raise the right kind of questions – not conceiving of nature in an instrumental way, and, at the same time, not giving way to some kind of re-enchantment of nature. Sometimes, in those new discussions where people bring up that we need a new ontology, and so on, I think this new ontology talk is not necessary. We do not need a new ontology in order to figure out that. And even in Marx, you have it. So, the interesting thing is the tension between two extremes: a re-enchanting nature and ontology that would not even allow for distinctions and so on, and the instrumental and exploitative version. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* already was somewhere in between. And it already had a strong critique of autonomy. It defended autonomy in more fashionable terms. It gives an idea of relational autonomy. And it also offers a critique of male dominance, I would say. Odysseus is like the mastermind of a male idea of how to control the world, how to be sovereign, and so on. So, there are a lot of things already there. Of course, I am not saying we just have to go back... This is not how I work, but it is important for Critical Theory to do both – to try to attract those resources and bring them into conversation.

There is an Argentine thinker, Eduardo Grüner, who says that he learned this difference between core and periphery, or center and periphery, not from the Latin American tradition of decolonial thinking or postcolonialism, or from the subaltern studies, but from the Critical Theory tradition and from Adorno, for example.

R.J.: Interesting...

We have a last question about post- and decolonialism...

R.J.: I am not such a specialist. But I would be actually interested in talking more about this at the Conference in Buenos Aires. When I talk about progress, I have a new way to react to some kind of questions. My idea, in the end, is that we would have a multiplicity of learning processes, and some of them interact and connect with each other. At the same time, my idea of learning processes is not giving a substantial but a somehow processual answer to what progress is, as I did in *Critique of Forms of Life*. A substantial account would place other people in the waiting room of history, as Chakrabarty says. And no one believes me; everyone thinks it is still like Western modernity that takes the lead in my thinking. So, I have found out a way to at least puzzle people a bit. I say: “did you know the fact that in some Brazilian tribes, or some societies, there have always been more than two genders?” This is like an anthropological fact. The dichotomy male/female was not valid in all societies. We are only now beginning to understand that gender is a spectrum. So, does this mean that those societies are more progressive than we are, or does it not? I would then argue that this depends. This can be judged from the substance – they already have fifteen genders and you are so stuck with your truth. But it is also about *the process* in which there is any development. And that sometimes puzzles my audience because I turn things around. It is like: “okay, the fact that we have autonomy here does not necessarily mean that everyone else is less advanced” because they might still end up valuing, cherishing autonomy. So, I found out that for that reason, at least, it is a very good point to make.

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“Take it up again and again!” Interview with Anthony Steinbock

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Abstract

Anthony Steinbock is one of the leading figures in the American phenomenology. In this conversation he talks about topics like generative phenomenology, heresy and orthodoxy of Husserl's exegesis, a non-foundational transcendental phenomenology (which is for him a co-relational social ontology), the crisis of Europe and the limit-phenomena, but also about moral emotions, heart-phenomena, mysticism and religious experience.

Keywords: Generative phenomenology, heart, Europe, critique, emotion

In order to introduce the abundant and plurality of themes of your work, we would like to start by asking your definition of phenomenology and in particular, generative phenomenology. How do you define phenomenology in general and what makes generative phenomenology particular among other ways of phenomenology?

A.S.: Most generally phenomenology is concerned with two kinds of inquiries or questions. It concerns (1) what something is and (2) how that what is given. Thus, phenomenology enquires into manners of givenness or how something is given, and it asks after the essential structures of what is given in experience. Perhaps this characterization is too broad for the meaning of phenomenology, but very generally, it

can be defined as a critical shift in perspective that allows us not to take things for granted, to perceive the powers and limits of meaning-emergence, to sketch meaningful and responsible engagement in the co-constitution of meaning, and to discern the structures of our world.

Where generative phenomenology is concerned, I can give two responses. When I first began to articulate a “generative phenomenology,” I was describing it in two ways simultaneously that are not very clear, ways that I would now like to distinguish. In one sense, generative phenomenology is another method of description. It occurs alongside static method and genetic method.

So, to begin with Husserl’s style of description and implicit methodology of phenomenological procedure, we can say that he would go from what he calls the “simple” to the “complex,” from the “lower” to the “higher,” and in some but not all cases, going from the “founding” to the “founded” layers of sense and meaning. Things changed discursively for him, however, when he reached those more “complex,” “higher,” “founded” phenomena. At this point he noticed that he was “already” describing phenomena that went beyond what he presupposed his method could allow. It was not a matter of discounting his conclusions, but it became a task for him of methodologically giving an account of these richer and more complex phenomena. It was at this time, at least by the early 1920s, that he formulated a distinction between static phenomena and genetic phenomena, and importantly, between static method and genetic method. These genetic phenomena included matters like kinaesthesia, normality and abnormality, self-temporalization, instinct, facticity, concordance and discordance, sleep as a constitutive problem, optimality, affectivity, passive genesis, association, motivation, etc.

I mentioned that things tended to change for Husserl *discursively* at this point. I mean by this not only that he explicitly formulated the distinction between static and genetic methods, but that he recast his evaluation of genetic and static phenomena. Having reached these so-called “higher” or “complex” or “founded” phenomena, he requalified them; what

was formerly termed the lower, the simple, or founding, are now designated as “abstract” and “founded”; what was higher or complex is now most “concrete” and in some cases even founding! That is, he now describes the “whole” from the perspective of the genetic insights, in which case the “static,” which was formerly “simple” and independent, is revealed as “dependent,” abstract, and in some cases, formal.

In my reading of the then relatively recently published material, and especially the unpublished manuscripts (unpublished at that time), I noticed a new problem-field circumscribed by the terminology of “generative phenomena.” This occurred clearly in places where fundamentally new phenomena were being described, phenomena that were *irreducible* to genetic phenomena. These included phenomena like homeworld and alienworld, home-companions, birth and death as constitutive features of experience, appropriation and transgression as kinds of constitution, familiarity and non-familiarity as modes of normality and abnormality, the occurrence of the prefix “*stamm*” in places where we might expect “primordial,” etc. These generative phenomena were also articulated around the term, “generativity.”

I noticed the emergence of a similar pattern here between genetic and generative phenomena that had occurred between static and genetic phenomena. Again, we have to remind ourselves that Husserl is always already working—at least implicitly—within the whole of the articulated unity of being—or as I will put it differently, within the movement of generativity. He is already there, at generativity, even if it does not become an explicit theme. Hence, when he does arrive there, he can write, as he has in fact done, that the most *concrete* phenomenon is generativity. When we abstract the dimension of historicity from generativity, we arrive at self-temporalization; when we abstract temporality from this genetic phenomenon, we have static conscious intending.

Of course, there was never any mention by Husserl of a “generative phenomenology.” In this specific sense, it did not exist as method. But it struck me that the next movement had to be taken—for Husserl, but more significantly for phenomenology as a whole. “All this” demanded a generative

phenomenology of “generativity” as the most concrete (but not exclusive) dimension of phenomenology. Thus, in some sense all phenomenology is/was “already” generative phenomenology, prompting Husserl to suggest that even the phenomenologists find themselves within generativity. Phenomenology is generative phenomenology, or alternately generative phenomenology is phenomenology as such. Accordingly, doing static phenomenology is already doing generative phenomenology from the position of the static, and describing static phenomena is already describing generativity from the angle of the static. It was with this understanding that I advanced generative phenomenology.

So, for me, generative phenomenology is phenomenology carried out in its multifarious ways. Generative phenomenology is what phenomenology is doing in its openness, and phenomenology is that practice that is open to all kinds of givenness no matter how they are given.

No matter how they are given?

A.S.: Yes, so it can’t rule out what counts as givenness in advance, or just because it does not correspond to what we think the given should be according to our usual habits of mind. In fact, there are different kinds of intentionalities that are not simply from a subject to an object or of the type, noesis-noema. They are not even restricted to a dynamic constitutive duet of noesis-noema (as Husserl calls it), which is already very rich.

Your understanding and the way of doing phenomenology originates from the Husserlian point of view. However, more than a scholarship on Husserl, it establishes an unfolding of phenomenological thought after Husserl. In this regard, how can the methodological transformation of phenomenology be thought of between the heresy and orthodoxy of Husserl among a variety of phenomenologies?

A.S.: This probably relates to the earlier question as well. Husserl himself originated and approached the phenomenological method in a certain way. We do a disservice to Husserl if we only remain with either the contradictions or

the impasses that he himself encountered without going beyond them or developing their consequences. In certain ways, we are being truer to Husserl in taking the next steps. This might be a matter of saying what Husserl could, should, or could not say. Of course, we have to let Husserl remain “Husserl,” and this pertains as well to phenomenological method. But this is precisely the question and issue at stake: What “is” phenomenological method in the dynamic sense? This problem is reflected in the title of *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology After Husserl*. “After Husserl” is both according to Husserl and but also after Husserl.

The Husserl heretics, as Ricoeur called them, are part of doing Husserlian phenomenology. This applies to Stein, Conrad-Martius, Heidegger, Scheler, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Marion, Derrida, et. al. I think they found themselves taking up this heritage and developing it.

So can we say that there are no heresies of Husserl in a way phenomenology includes all “heresies” of Husserl under the title of phenomenology?

A.S.: This is a difficult point, and it is related to the remark I made previously about what phenomenological method “is” in a dynamic sense. There are certainly modifications of phenomenology, and phenomenologists themselves of course disagree about the extent of those modifications. We certainly do not want to equate, for example, hermeneutics and phenomenology. But I would not rule out the possibility and even necessity of, say, a “hermeneutical phenomenology.” My main point is that a literalism imposed on Husserlian phenomenology actually does this very phenomenology a disservice. This is in part due to the fact that Husserl himself goes beyond what he could do in some ways. We find this when he goes from a static to a genetic phenomenology. We also find this when he takes up limit-phenomena that go beyond his present understanding of method, but describes them anyway. (His description of “Fremderfahrung” as accessibility in the mode of inaccessibility and incomprehensibility is an example of this.)

This is also due in part to the fact that there are many strands of Husserl, as it were. This makes it all the more challenging because you eventually will have to take a stand on the matters and methods as well as and their implications, because in some cases, they go in different directions. In some cases, his own reflections on what he is doing might be misunderstandings of his own descriptions. One reason we get these “strands” of Husserl is because he was a very honest scientist and tried to describe things themselves faithfully. I think that Husserl had that sense of genuine discovery and he was willing to “take it up again and again.”

In the same vein, we have one more question about transcendental phenomenology. You use transcendental not in the sense of foundational. Could you please explain your understanding of the transcendental role of subjectivity and its place in the phenomenological method? Must phenomenology be transcendental? Is it helpful to think of the lifeworld in a transcendental manner?

A.S.: I will try to be brief on this matter, but there is a lot to say here. First, I began with the assumption that for most if not all readers of Husserl, transcendental meant foundational, and this implied in various ways a subjective foundation of meaning. What I meant by “non-foundational” and more specifically a non-foundational transcendental phenomenology was a co-relational social ontology. I was not simply trying to be provocative with this seemingly paradoxical expression, but to suggest a phenomenology of intersubjectivity that was actually being broached in Husserl’s descriptions of generative phenomena. There is nothing wrong with the phenomenon of foundation, by the way, it was just that it had become too rigidly identified with a subject-centered origin of meaning to the exclusion of other manners of constitution. In this respect, non-foundational is to be understood in *Home and Beyond* as co-foundational.

Since that time, I have come to recognize many different senses of “foundation.” Where relations of founding are concerned, we can describe (1) relations of dependence, (2) relations of hierarchical ordering, (3) relations of

embeddedness, and (4) when the founding is given through the founded experience. And as a cross-section for all of these, there are positive and negative relations of foundation (see *Knowing by Heart*, ch. 8).

When I speak of transcendental phenomenology, I am understanding the eidetic or the structural dimension of phenomenology together with a description of manners of givenness. Accordingly, there are two sorts of questions: questions involving structures that give us the field of possibility and the how of givenness. But those dimensions or field of questions are not reducible to a subject; they also yield intersubjective formations of meaning; they have emotional dimensions of meaning that have a different structure of givenness than presentational givenness (perceptive or judicative givenness). So, I think that the question “must phenomenology be transcendental?” must be answered in the positive, but it does not exclude a hermeneutical phenomenology. This is the case because phenomenology (understood in a broad sense) cannot rest simply with being a description of feeling-states or a phenomenological autobiography, so to speak, but also investigates structures of those experiences, where these structures are more or less material, more or less formal. It describes in relation to modes of givenness, a priori structures. For Husserl, as for Scheler, “a priori” is not an epistemological concept (as it is for Kant or even Kripke), i.e., modifying a way of knowing, but is ontological.

Where the relation between transcendental and lifeworld is concerned, I can say yes, the lifeworld *can* be understood in a transcendental manner, but this has a very peculiar context and implications. I understand it in the way in which Husserl suggests that we must distinguish between that great task of a lifeworld ontology and a transcendental description of the lifeworld (section 37, *Crisis*). A transcendental description of the lifeworld is of course not the same as the lifeworld being a transcendental source. However, such a description for Husserl did point to the lifeworld as transcendental. For example, one only need to consult his investigations into the earth as earth-ground (*Erdboden*) and

the world as world-horizon. For me, those earlier descriptions of the lifeworld in the *Crisis* belong to an ontology of the lifeworld—for the most part. In some places, it belongs to a naïve, natural attitude understanding of the lifeworld as when we look for the certain eidetic structures of the lifeworld. When he points to the transcendental concepts of the lifeworld, he is looking at sense-conditions and conditions of possibility that found the very experience of the lived-body. The earth-ground “founds” the lived-body as a constitutive source in relation to which the lived-body “founds” the sense of objects and the here and there of things. Ultimately, the sense in which the world-horizon and the earth-ground become the transcendental concepts of the lifeworld require “completion,” becoming more concrete. This leads us to a generative phenomenology involving the interrelation of homeworlds and alienworlds—but I have passed over many steps getting to this point in such a short summary.

Phenomenology for Husserl was also an elaborate description of the crisis of Europe. Today the advancement of phenomenology exceeds the borders of Europe, even that of the West: in South America or in countries such as Japan, Iran, or Turkey, phenomenology means more than that which Husserl could have imagined.

*In your work, generous references to non-European traditions of thought are followed and sometimes encounters with them can be found to understand these other philosophies in a phenomenological manner. We would like to ask how phenomenology can be more opened to non-European thoughts and how its exclusionist history (from *Krisis* of Husserl to contemporary works) can be critically discussed in order to give more place to the openness of phenomenological tradition. How does phenomenology methodologically and historically allow us to conduct such a dialogue and encounter on a non-hierarchical level? How can the historicity of phenomenology regarding Eurocentric roots be overcome?*

A.S.: If phenomenology remains open (as I said before) to all manners of givenness no matter how they give themselves, and not presupposing how they are to be given, that's already a

beginning of openness to other experiences that might be alien to our own. In terms of the structure of the homeworld and alienworld within Husserl, the particular insight that Husserl had in phenomenology was historically rooted. The eidetic structures were accessed through these particular modes of experience or historical “springboards” (an insight Scheler develops in his early work). Accordingly, these insights are born from a particular homeworld in the larger or smaller sense. We cannot ask Husserl, or anyone else, to be *completely* beyond where they are. If this were the case, there could be no “alien,” phenomenologically speaking. On the other hand, because these structures take us beyond ourselves, Husserl cannot be completely “home” when describing these kinds of experiences, either; none of us can. So, the question is then, how do we remain open to what is radically different without being able to anticipate it from the home perspective.

The alien only has the sense of the alien as from the home and in that sense precisely, in its birth in Europe, it is already exposed to what is non-European. Not all phenomenologists have taken it like this, but I think that is part of the very structure of the experience; the home is already constituted in the way it is in relationship to what is other, or to what is alien. That is the very co-foundational, irreducible structure of home and alien. Now, this can still remain naïve. What is needed is a critical reflection on this very co-foundational structure so as not to take our presuppositions and prejudices for granted. In those encounters with the alien, we can be called back ourselves for critical re-evaluation and possible transformation.

Concerning the last part of the question on the historicity of phenomenology with respect to its Eurocentric roots, I can say in one respect it cannot be overcome because it has emerged from them. If we mean Eurocentric in an exclusive manner, then the response is “yes.” Does it mean that we can undo the history of phenomenology? No, because that is what gave it a voice. Still, if it can be modified, if it can be transformed in our encounters in openness, then “yes.” Much depends upon how we understand “teleology,” and whether or not it is identified with a functional notion of progress. For

reasons that I examine in *Knowing by Heart* (mainly as it concerns interpersonal revelation) I do not think that phenomenology need be identified with a functional notion of progress.

Phenomenology is in principle open to non-European thoughts. It has to be. If it is taken in an exclusive way, then there is a misunderstanding of the nature of phenomenology. I tried to give examples of this in *Home and Beyond* and *Phenomenology and Mysticism*. There is an insight into radical emptiness emergent from a particular Zen Buddhist tradition, which is non-personal, non-Abrahamic, and that is expressed in a non-generative coming into being and passing away. That is a radically different insight to which Husserl could not have (had) access in an original manner, I suspect. It is misleading to say that we are all integrated into the same structure of experience or ultimate reality. People are well-intentioned by wanting to emphasize similarities and unity; but that would also be a misunderstanding, and not do justice to any. Much more interesting and “essential” are irreconcilable and perhaps incommensurable differences. It is not the one or the other, but the spark that flashes forth “in between.” That’s where the richness can be found and where we have to learn to be comfortable (or uncomfortable). In that sense, a priori structures are not universal. Yes, we can describe the a priori structure of generativity of which the Abrahamic or “western,” or that in which the personalist tradition partakes. But generativity itself has to be open to what is radically non-generative while remaining itself generative. Otherwise, we take (perhaps inadvertently) the position of a neutral “third,” which hides a presumptive force of domination. It is only through the touching that there is the touched; such a relation as relation is not given by observing it from a putative objective perspective that now counts as “universal.”

Moreover, do you think “the crisis” that is idiosyncratic to Europe is adopted by outside Europe? Or, alternatively, was this relatively local crisis already pointing out more worldwide problems?

A.S.: The crisis idiosyncratic or unique to Europe has its roots in a kind of thinking that grasps an experiential meaning or meanings with an orientation, simultaneously sees a deviation of and from that meaning sufficient enough to threaten that orientation (i.e., not a mere infraction), all within a context. The particular crisis that Husserl identifies comes from detecting a diremption of thinking that understands being as what is to be quantifiable: to be means to be mathematizable. It is not that being mathematizable, the quest for exactitude, measurement, quantification, etc. is a problem. The “crisis” emerges when it becomes the substrate for all kinds of experiences such that these other kinds of experience literally do not “measure up” to this “new” superimposed standard. Husserl identifies this crisis as a reversal. To say that the crisis is itself a reversal is to say that quantification is not the core experience to which the everyday “lifeworld” must measure up; that is, lifeworld experience is not a deficient mode of scientific exactitude.

To challenge the crisis is to reverse the reversal (something we continue to face in most university environments today!). How does reversing the reversal take place? Beginning from the naïve assumption of the scientific attitude as the basis, Husserl first identifies a distinctive realm of experience, the lifeworld of experience that is different from the scientific exactitude and its goals. Second, he attempts to show in what ways such reasoning is actually founded in lifeworld experience. Yes, we can attempt to clarify experience through quantification, but not only is such a method not the only way, but it itself is founded in a different way clarified phenomenologically. Insofar as others outside of Europe have succumbed to the clarification of reality through quantification in this way, for example, they are subject to the same kind of crises.

More broadly, it is also possible to say that insofar as any culture identifying itself as a particular orientation (that does not have to have a fixed teleology) and that then experiences a decisive movement from this orientation—insofar as this is the case, it would yield an experience of crisis. Hippocrates understood that a crisis could be good in the sense

that the body identifies a problem to be addressed through critique (crisis and critique having the same root). If we were never to experience ourselves with a particular orientation of meaning, there could never be a sense of crisis or critique.

Regarding the different types of evidences and limit-phenomena you draw, we come to embrace a new phenomenological rationality in which so-called “non-phenomena” find meaning in experience. We would like to hear about the nature of the enlargement of phenomenological rationality. Does this enlargement come from dealing with the description of these limit-phenomena and other kinds of “non-phenomena”? How could such a transformation happen? How can the phenomenological method offer us more than a narrow understanding of rationality in which there is no place for the other person, the Holy, emotions, and heart?

A.S.: You are going to get tired of hearing this, but it has to do with this openness of phenomenology that takes seriously being open to kinds of givenness that are non-traditional in a certain aspect – non-traditional within the understanding of what phenomenology is, and in some respects, has been doing.

We have been accustomed to understand that an object of experience is correlative to perception or judgement – and (just for the sake of discussion), this is taken to be the traditional noesis-noema correlation, which is not, by the way, a one-sided correlation. It is dynamic, as Husserl calls it, a “constitutive duet.” In any case, this becomes the baseline of what phenomenology can handle, whether it pertain to perceptual objects or judicative propositions and intellectual ideas.

This is the presupposition when Husserl enquires into the experience of the alien. As phenomenologist, he has to ask initially not “what is the other or alien,” but “how is the alien given to me,” “What is its mode of givenness?” “What is my mode of access to it?” He responds that the other or the alien is given as not being able to be given; its “givenness” is such that it is not being able to be given; it is accessible in the mode of inaccessibility; and if we mean by comprehensibility, the ability to grasp something like an object, then, it is given in

the mode of incomprehensibility. While such an articulation is sensitive to a peculiar way of being given and is non-reductive, it nonetheless presupposes that givenness or accessibility is based on how an object or objectlike structure presents itself. Husserl recognizes that the other person or the other lived-body is not given like an object. Therefore, our experience of “it” is not being able “to experience” it (i.e., as if it were an object and where experience is identified with the presentation of an object). This is as far as he goes in some of his texts, and it is the reason we can identify them (and I have tried to identify them) as “limit-phenomena.” Just what are limit-phenomena is a complex question because this can shift within the context of static, genetic, and generative methods (see *Limit-Phenomena and Phenomenology in Husserl*.) This is an initial recognition of how the phenomenological method can be open to more than a narrow understanding of “phenomena.” It is an openness to different kinds of evidence. It also requires being ready to describe not just different kinds of experience or evidence, but different kinds of deception and self-deception, modalizations of experience, etc. that are not the same as dealing with something given illusory or mistaken in terms of perceptual experience. This leads to the other question you posed. I want to suggest that the expansion of rationality can only go as far as “limit-phenomena” if we are to do justice to the phenomena, and even to reason.

Can we call it “the enlargement of rationality” then?

A.S.: For me, no, in the sense that there cannot be an expansion of reason to account for all phenomena (which presupposes that all phenomena must have a rational structure or be given in a single basic style of intentionality). Claude Romano does seem to want to enlarge reason this in his magisterial work, *At the Heart of Reason*. At least, I would say that he wants to move in this direction. I also think that there are also others who want to expand the sphere of rationality in similar ways. For my part, it is not a matter of expanding rationality, but of not identifying all kinds of cognition with rationality, and in addition, to describe modes of cognition that are not necessarily “rational”—for example, a “knowing by

heart.” This is simultaneously not to remain committed to a dualism of reason/rationality and sensibility.

*Before coming to the issue of “the cognition of the heart”, let’s discuss the heart. In your recent works, especially in *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidence of the Heart* (2014) and *Knowing by Heart: Loving as Participation and Critique* (2021), you acknowledge various perspectives on the heart, employing the cross-cultural references, e.g., from Eastern traditions to the Abrahamic religions of the West. We can briefly put it this way: What is the heart? What can phenomenology say about this fleshy thing inside us — an intimate thing that is close enough, but still somehow distant?*

A.S.: That is a good question! The heart is a particular order of evidence and order of givenness – that I call “schema.” I don’t want to call it “sphere” or “dimension” because it is extremely articulated in terms of feeling and different kinds of feeling. Feeling is an intentional structure and is different from perceiving; still, it is fundamentally relational. Within “feelings,” we can identify different kinds of emotions (personal, non-personal, metaphysical), attunements (or what Heidegger might call “moods”), and also psycho-physical feelings like enjoyment or sympathy. Further, there is a main distinction between feelings and feeling-states (among which we find passions, sentiments, affects, conditions, etc.). That “schema” or those different kinds of evidences or experiences are what make up such a heart-cognition.

Is the heart a “fleshy thing”? I don’t know. I am not reducing it to the physical heart, although there is an interesting relation there between the physical and the spiritual. That is, it is interesting to observe a correlation between the heart, the heart-beat, excitement, “sympathetic” systems, and at least a change in feeling-states. Natalie Depraz works more in that direction of the “fleshy side,” advancing a “cardio-phenomenology” to describe an integrative heart-system (and not a brain-system).

Regarding the relation between feeling and feeling-states, we can say that we live through a dynamic movement of

loving, hating, or trusting without at the same time feeling a particular feeling-state. I can live in a hating movement but not feel hatred, but feel joy. Or I might not just be “in love” while loving, I might be suffering. There is always a link between feeling and feeling-states but they don’t necessarily have one-to-one correspondence. And that’s why I say that I might have a particular feeling-state and be excited about the experience of a feeling-state, which is related to the heart in a way we do not have in the brain or in a thought. In fact, I might also be excited about a thought and so live through a particular emotional experience that is founding in relation to thinking.

Let’s come to the issue of the heart. The heart in philosophy has been mostly clouded with the opposite of reason, something non-rational which is related to sensibility. Moreover, in the cultural imagination, it is associated with “inferior” qualities such as women, eastern, and black, in short, what is opposite to rational. However, your book presents a new reception of the heart that makes it possible to consider its own way of cognition. Could you please explain to us your project about the heart and its place in the human person as a way of critique?

A.S.: I partly addressed some of these questions previously, and this has to do with overcoming the dualism of reason and sensibility, and describing the distinctive roles of the emotions in our socio-political imaginary. But I would like to say a little more about the place of the human person as a way of critique. There is a distinction to be made between (1) naivety, which is called into question through a rational critique and (2) vulnerability peculiar to loving (or trusting, for example). We are most familiar with the former in the phenomenological tradition. This entails bracketing the natural attitude, and overcoming that kind of naivety as much as possible.

Because this model tends to dominate, we often reduce vulnerability to the problem of naivety, and then work “to reduce” vulnerability as if it were a matter of being naïve. The attempt then to be critical would be to generate a risk analysis or at the very least, to remove the feature of vulnerability.

However, vulnerability is an essential feature of loving, and when we attempt to eradicate the former, we are no longer participate in the movement of loving (or trusting). But critique does not have to be only a matter of overcoming naivety—which is of course necessary. It can be a matter of discernment (κρίνειν/krinein) of the heart. Rather than a critique of loving, it is a critique *from* loving as participating being. This implies that loving has a peculiar normative status. Such a discernment has to do with all other kinds of clues to what is going on emotionally that can be seen in terms of particular emotions like shame.

There is for example a genuine shame, which is not reducible to a manipulative kind or abusive kind of shame. The genuine structure of shame is such that a certain experience before the other throws us back on ourselves. It opens the possibility of returning to our “true-selves” or “genuine selves” or becoming or re-aligning ourselves to who we are most deeply. If we have an abusive relationship in which those senses of ourselves are already distorted, then that shame becomes distorted and that would demand a particular way of critique as well. Experiences like shame or guilt—experiences that throw us back on ourselves—can be deceptive. This is why a distinctive kind of discernment is necessary, a mindful discernment of the heart that is rooted in genuine loving. This presupposes that there is a genuine self-love which means becoming who I am, but also in relationship to the love of another or love from another. Such a discernment of the heart has an intersubjective dimension (as in the case of mentors, exemplars, or partners) as well as a dimension of historical efficacy. There is much more to be said here, but in short, there is a different kind of critique—a discernment of the heart—that is to be distinguished from (and I suggest founding for) the epistemic critique of naivety.

I am happy to see such a project which puts the heart into the heart of the philosophy that before associated the heart with mostly inferior qualities.

The other question is about religious experience. In what sense does phenomenology offer an account of religious

experience? Philosophers have regard for speaking “generally” about the religious, diminishing the disparities. But your 2007 book, Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience, particularly scrutinizes three unorthodox mystics from three different traditions: St. Teresa of Avila, Rabbi Dov Baer, and Ruzbihan Baqli. What they have in common, as you remarkably argue, is their “vertical” relations to the other. Besides their everyday practices, to what extent are these various (Abrahamic) religious perspectives divergent from one another? How does this dissimilarity have an effect on the verticality of religious experience?

A.S.: Let me take these two questions in the order in which they are posed.

(1) In *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, the question “in what sense can and perhaps does phenomenology offer an account of religious experience?” was a leading question for me. I did not begin with a pre-set answer; it was a genuine question. To broach this question, I wanted to look at the first-person accounts of so-called “religious” experiences to see first all how they deal with the problem of evidence as well as deception, etc.

So the first question with which we have to grapple is whether all kinds of experiences are essentially the same, if they succumb to the same kind of “givenness,” or have the same kind of evidence, etc.

Allow me to appeal to an issue that was developed in a slightly different context in a latter book, *Moral Emotions*. One of the main leading questions there (which applies *mutatis mutandis* to religious experience) concerned whether or not an experience has to follow the relation of founding that Husserl understood initially between an objectivating act and non-objectivating acts. Does it have to be founded in this an epistemic act (i.e., a presentational act or function) in order to have its relationship to an object through sense? That is to say, is there an ultimate dependency of these other experiences (interpersonal, religions, and so forth) on the presentational experiences (i.e., the experience of judgement or the experience of perception)?

For example, I see a painting and it is a particular object that gives a certain way of evidence. “That is an ugly painting,” or “I see a beautiful painting.” For Husserl, the ugly or beautiful painting would be related to non-objectivating dimension that borrows from the objectivating one. Ultimately, this is one unified act for him. Nevertheless, what is going on in it can be distinguished in terms of two identifiable moments: one, the founded, which borrows its intentional structure from another, the founding, in order to have that experience. Accordingly, we can discern this founding/founded structure because we can strip off the founded (here, valuing level) and still leave the founding layer (the epistemic objectivating layer) intact as the basic structure.

But when I examined certain moral or interpersonal emotions in terms of their structures (for example, their relations to otherness, to modalizations, to temporality, etc.), I found that this was not the case. This was especially evident in emotions like shame, guilt, pride, repentance, trust, hope and despair, humility, loving, and hating.

Likewise, religious experiences are not perceptual or judicative experiences, so they cannot be reduced to the intentionality of presentation. But we also have to be careful and not assume that they have the structures as or are reducible to moral experience. They require their own analyses.

(2) The second question you posed concerns the effect of the dissimilarities within the verticality of religious experience. This is both an important and interesting question. For me, “verticality” evokes and signifies those dynamic vectors of experience that have a unique structure of their own, harbor their own kinds of evidence and manners of givenness, and as such are irreducible to the field of experience characterized by presentation. Religious experience is one kind of verticality.

My field of description in *Phenomenology and Mysticism* was circumscribed by inter-Personal relations (religious relations). And these were limited to the “Abrahamic” tradition. That is, while most phenomenologists deal only with the Christian tradition, and with some exceptions and qualifications, the Jewish experience—both broadly understood—this was too limiting where religious experience as

inter-Personal was concerned—and for the problem of religious evidence. On the other hand, I did not make a universal claim for all spirituality. So, for my phenomenological investigations, I took as examples St. Teresa of Avila, who is a woman of particular time in Christianity, Rabbi Dov Baer, of a different era and who belonged to a specific Hasidic tradition in Judaism, and the earlier mystic, Ruzbihan Baqli from the Islamic Sufi tradition. So, I began with a sort of “natural attitude” unifying position of the Abrahamic tradition as a starting point, but not as a presupposed result of phenomenological investigation.

Taking each on their own, and in and through these extremely interesting and complex differences, I found structural similarities that did unite them across these differences of cultural, history, worship, gender. In fact, the mystics of different traditions had more in common with each other (by virtue of their experiences and kind of evidences in play) than did the particular mystic and their own respective faith-tradition. These revealed above and beyond everyday similarities and differences, essential similarities by virtue of the structure of their “religious” experiences—nuanced by their historical and cultural position, gender, worship, etc.

Each in their own way, they described kinds of experiences of the holy that, on the one hand, corresponded more or less to my efforts to provoke them, and significantly, those on the other hand that could not be so provoked. For example, in St. Teresa, they were called acquired and infused prayer, in Dov Baer, natural and divine souls, and in Baqli, they were states and stations. In her earlier writings, St. Teresa described four such levels, in later writings, seven. Dov Baer described five divine souls, and amazingly Baqli alludes to over a thousand stations. (One of my favorites is from Baqli: the station of the laughter. I would have expected something like “calm,” “quiet,” “mercy,” but the special relation to God – a station – as laughter? – that’s just beautiful.) In any case, all of these people we call “mystics” undertook the effort of description, not because they wanted to understand themselves, but because they are trying to help others: people with whom they were working, friends, or those in a mentoring relation. These were very intimate descriptions of inter-Personal and

interpersonal experiences; they have all similar kind of relationship of discerning these experiences with another. I cannot go into all of this here, but they all described a fundamentally unique structure of intentionality (that did not have a noesis:noema structure), distinctive structure of evidence, modalizations of evidence, problems of deception, verifying and corroborating experiences, the interpersonal and inter-Personal nature of the experiences, and so on.

To respond to your second question, there is a peculiar relation of the starting points for each of the mystics I examined (in their distinctive faith, style of prayer, gender-positions, historical era, practices, cultures, etc.), and the religious insights garnered through their experiences that revealed religious a priori structures. To be sure, their own traditions nurtured and nuanced their respective experiences, and they are not nothing; nevertheless, in and through these significant differences, their experiences and descriptions revealed a core of verticality—if we want to call it that.

And also, you offer a new way to understand the relation between the secular and the religious from a phenomenological perspective. Could you mention a little from your stand-point of discussing the secular and the religious, and their relationship in regard to your project?

A.S.: First, when I am describing the “religious,” I don’t mean belonging to a religion, belief in “God,” participating in cult or rituals. In some ways, “religion” can be secular in the sense the adherents to a religion are not necessarily animated by the religious experience. What I mean by the religious relation, then, it is not a subscription to an idea of God, but rather an experience or experiences of an absolute (holiness) received [holiness constituted as absolute, absolute constituted as holiness] and that guides implicitly or explicit our practices. This seems to be a basic structure of personal generative experience in the sense that even if we do not have an explicit “absolute experience,” we still live in ways such that some finite relative thing at least implicitly occupies the place of an absolute. And because finite or relative things cannot take the

place of absolute experience, we witness a constant pursuit of relative, finite things to fill that place (which they cannot), attempting unwittingly to elevate the finite-relative matter to the status of an infinite-absolute. In political-economic terms, this is manifest as fetishism or reification dominant in capitalism (broadly understood); in religious terms, this is generally understood as idolatry.

If phenomenology is open to all matters and modes of givenness, no matter how they are given, then phenomenology has to open to absolute experience as well as relative experience. I sought to trace this out in the radically personal accounts given by those exemplary individuals we call “mystics.” Phenomenologically, however, the way was paved by thinkers like Husserl, Scheler, Stein, Reinach, Walther, Levinas, Marion, Henry, just to name some main figures.

The second issue concerns our Modern prejudices. I’ve dealt with this in *Moral Emotions* and *Knowing by Heart*, so I do not want to belabour the point here, but the problem is two-fold. The first concerns the exclusive categories of reason and sensibility; the second, secularism as a Modern starting-point.

The important recognition of the role of reason in our lives has produced for the Western Modern tradition a dualism between rationality and sensibility that we spoke about previously. This has tended to shove the heart (and the entire “emotional” sphere”) to the side of sensibility, to maintain that the heart is devoid of spirit, and to oversee the operations of the heart by making sure it is under the correct tutelage of reason. In this way, reason has been allowed to colonize the heart where evidence and the spiritual becoming of person and social relations are concerned.—This is why, for me, it is ultimately not helpful to expand rationality even further to account for different phenomena. With such an expansion, for example, trust is no longer a kind of freedom as being bound to others in their transcendence as essentially vulnerable, but becomes a product of rational belief sorted by risk analysis (where vulnerability is reducible to naivety, as noted previously.)

This same dualism has promoted the presupposition that rationality is neutral, and our new (Modern) starting point is secularism. If this were the case, then emotions, religious

experience, etc., would have to be seen as “add-ons,” and unjustifiable ones at that. But I have tried to show through *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, *Moral Emotions*, and *Knowing by Heart*, that the reverse is true. Secularism is an abstraction from the “heart,” and sets itself up as self-grounding. To undo this reversal is not to return to a kind of pre-ideological social imaginary or so-called religious orthodoxy. This would be to presuppose the same assumptions as Modernity under a different rubric. Rather, it is to recognize the distinctive dimension of the “heart” that has been present in Modernity (but as relegated to the side-lines in Modernity), and to understand secularism as not-self-grounding, which is ultimately to say, as “religious.”

Camus is instructive here. In his, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, He not only poses suicide as a philosophical problem, but he posits it as the “one truly serious philosophical problem.” He does this because suicide concerns the problem of absolutes in human experience, and this has implications all the way down, from metaphysics to existentialism. Camus’s point is that if there is no transcendent ground for hope, there is also no transcendent ground for despair. Even suicide, taking one’s life out of despair, asserts some ground of meaning—maybe one that is not accessible to me, now, but it is there, was there, or should be there, for me: suicide tries to settle the problem of the absurd. Absurdity is the admission that the world is inherently neither meaningful nor meaningless; it is neither rational nor irrational. Absurdity is the sheer randomness of these qualities’ emergence and my place in the world—to which the absurd person responds accordingly with sheer arbitrary indifference. Is there anything that can function as the ground of human meaning? Are absolutes of any kind experienced in human existence? If we have no evidence for God, there can be no automatic default now to honor Reason, individuality, community, humanity, and so on as our new absolutes. And if we assert not only that we cannot know God, but that there is no God (i.e., no transcendent absolute), then we cannot somehow still say that we should be true to something (the other, meaning, freedom, capital, etc.). Again,

what would be the basis for these assertions by existentialists who are true to their name? So, for Camus, there is either a radical “secularism”—absurdity—all the way for *every* experience, or there is “verticality.” Trying to settle the absurd in any way is itself a clue to verticality.

You delineate “surprise” as “an emotion while being neither an affect, like a startle-reflex, nor a moral emotion, like shame, guilt, or humility.” Is there a complete surprise? Were we really surprised at the outbreak of Covid and its tremendous effects on our lives? With all “warnings” by scientists as well as scholars, do we still have a right to be surprised at the refugee crises, the problems of climate change, or natural catastrophes?

A.S.: Is there a complete surprise? It is an interesting question because it asks if there is something that radically disrupts the flow of expectation. I think that it is possible, but it is always rooted in the mode of expectation. If I am surprised, in some sense I am accepting what I cannot accept. This already takes place in the process of basic doxic attitude. If you mean a complete surprise that I cannot accept, that wouldn't be a surprise: If a complete surprise is a complete rupture, that would not mean what I understand as surprise; it can be a trauma of some kind, perhaps. But I understand by surprise an overarching acceptance of what I cannot accept that keeps going; it is an existential posture. If the complete surprise means that I am overwhelmed and cannot be integrated into the experience, that would be shock.

In your question you are also asking about “the right to be surprised.” This is a different question, to my mind. I think that this would be better expressed as “we should have (or not have) *expected* such and such.” The question is interesting because it points to how with all the indications, all the hints and all the motivations for an expectation, how is it that we could continue not to observe the outcomes, and then claim to be surprised. That goes to a certain natural attitude, maybe blindness, or even better refusal. Ultimately, it goes to our moral make-up.

Let's come to speak about more concrete problems of our planet. Is phenomenology able to speak with the contemporary problems of us (living beings), the planet? How could we respond to such problems "phenomenologically"?

A.S.: One way of responding to these questions is to ask after norms of care or loving where nonhuman animals and the environment are concerned. Or put in a more drastic manner, why should care (aside from pure self-interest) that we are headed toward an uninhabitable earth—as David Wallace-Wells put it? Am I obligated to do anything or change my way of life? Ought I do something at least to mitigate dramatic climate change?

In *Knowing by Heart*, I suggested that all reality, all creation, is fundamentally and most radically participated as "beloveds." I realize that this is a curious formulation, and can sound sentimental (maudlin, gushy), new age (everything is love), or amorphous and vague. Despite these possible misunderstandings, I am led to this expression, "beloved," by virtue of the metaphysical-phenomenological insight into givenness: what is given at this level is revealed in the opening or partaking that lets be; loving incites the other to become in the way of its own value-magnitude. In terminology from that work, loving is participating being, and what is participated is as beloved. It is the beloved in and of itself and as such that incites the loving and compels the loving responsivity. It is this responsivity that founds responsibility. Thus, the value of life and living beings, for example, flashes forth in the living being, and calls forth responsivity to it as life-value (as care, tending to, intervention, and so forth). This is not dependent upon my giving it that value. The value of life is intrinsic to the living being and is there to behold and to nourish as such, and this is what founds the possibility of sympathy. But beholding it as such is also not neutral; it is calling forth a to-love (to foster it in its own way toward its own depth, vertically). Again, any beloved who loves is person—not just the human being. Primordial Loving, if we want to call it that, is personal in this sense, and as such is a vigilant invitation or solicitation, or the compelling incitement of all beloveds to be (love). This is where we find the peculiar

normativity in loving. Obviously, I do not love with the intention that a beloved becomes person. I don't love something in order for it to show itself, to become something else, or even in order for it to be itself. This would not be letting others be who they are of their own accord. It would be manipulative, controlling, prideful, and ultimately a form of hating.

Husserl identified a certain crisis of his time, and certainly phenomenology is not just able to but needs to intervene. For Husserl it was a matter of being a functionary of humanity. This brings us to your earlier question concerning crises. I think that we would be identifying different crises today as failures of as interpersonal (e.g., the refugee crises) related to climate crises and interspecies crises. And getting back to the problem of the "secular": the questions that pertain to human persons are not simply human questions and their responses cannot be merely "human" or "secular" ones, either. They are answered from the perspective of sacredness in the everyday. I do *not* mean that somehow "God" magically intervenes; rather, the ecological, for example, is not ultimately a secular issue, but is already founded in loving.

Reading and understanding Husserl is quite demanding. But what is more difficult is to specialize in Husserl's philosophy, regarding not only his monumental project but also the never-ending collection of his works, manuscripts, and lecture notes. As a scholar who has dedicated a great deal of time and effort to Husserl, what do you recommend for the young researchers of phenomenology? Is there a "method" for reading Husserl?

A.S.: It's a good question, a question that many a beginner has confronted one way or another. I don't know if there is a method of reading Husserl, let alone one method of reading Husserl.

What I can suggest is that young researchers in phenomenology read Husserl before reading any commentaries on Husserl. It is going to be difficult; that's ok. Of course, certain works can be a guide to Husserl. But as a beginner—and this may seem non-intuitive—it is important to confront

the thinker, and not determine your reading by interpretations that others have discovered. This means that you will have to do a lot of reading and re-reading; but it is necessary in order to get a sense of the whole and then to retrace particular themes that emerge or become particularly prominent. This might apply to reading any major philosopher, but it is especially important for Husserl because of his attempts at doing phenomenology (or “ways” into phenomenology), his various “introductions” to phenomenology, and the experimental and experiential nature of his writing, which is sometimes at odds with his own self-understanding regarding what he accomplished. Not just a clear-sighted knowledge of what Husserl is saying, but problems, confusions, questions are equally revelatory and perhaps generative of insights. It is only after such an initial encounter that I would suggest combing through the secondary literature. Finally, I would recommend not just trying to understand what Husserl is saying, but as a way of doing this, trying to see what Husserl himself is attempting to elucidate in and through his descriptions (to see what he is seeing and how he is seeing).

In the last semesters, you gave a doctoral seminar on Max Scheler at Stony Brook. He is one of the most ignored figures in the history of phenomenology. You, on the other hand, appreciate his work against the stream. Can you describe your intellectual relationship with Max Scheler? What makes him so crucial in the phenomenological way of doing philosophy?

A.S.: When I started doing philosophy and reading phenomenology in a concerted way, it was actually from Merleau-Ponty, then Heidegger, and then back to Husserl. The person who introduced me to phenomenology was Arthur R. Luther, and his major inspiration, though not by any means exclusively, was Scheler. So, in some ways, learning phenomenology was in fact informed by Scheler without me necessarily knowing it. But that’s more autobiographical.

What makes Scheler crucial to phenomenology, and philosophy more generally, concerns his openness to the problem of givenness and evidence with respect to multiple dimensions of experience. Not only did he recognize more than

one kind of intentionality, he was immediately critical of the rationality/sensibility dualism (which I mentioned above), and the distinctive role that the emotions play as informing “spirit” (and not simply as a matter of psychology). In describing the role feeling, he saw its irreducible relation to value, where value is not a “thing” or “object,” but feature of givenness. As Husserl identified a reversal peculiar to the lifeworld and the sciences that marked a crisis in humanity, Scheler identified a reversal of value in the order of the heart, identifiable as ressentiment, that marked a “crisis” in interpersonal and even ecological being. Finally—in a way entirely creative way—he engaged the personal/interpersonal, historical, cultural, emotional dimensions of existence from the very start. Just to be clear, Husserl is himself already “there” at generativity from the start, but more in an implicit way. Scheler starts there, and it enables him to understand the emotional sphere, which is constitutive of the person, not only as distinct from rationality, as a cognition having its own style, but where loving in concerning, as founding for epistemic cognition.

We would like to hear your opinion about contemporary phenomenological studies. For example, how do you find its engagement with neuro-sciences? Are you pleased with neuro-phenomenology?

A.S.: I really have to remain more or less more silent on this issue because I don’t know enough about it. I would have to defer to other contemporary phenomenologists like Natalie Depraz, Dan Zahavi, or allied thinkers like Shaun Gallagher and Evan Thompson.

Apart from its relationship with neuroscience, how do you see the contemporary situation of phenomenology in the States? Is there such a school so-called “American phenomenology”, especially in regard to the Phenomenology Research Center at Stony Brook?

A.S.: That is a hard question, and it would be presumptive of me to say that there is an American school of

phenomenology, especially if we consider our Canadian colleagues to the north and Mexican colleagues to the south of the US. I am curious to learn if you see a particular style.

If it is possible to designate a style or styles of phenomenology in the US, such a designation would be gained by reflecting on the kind of questions that are being asked and the way the descriptions are being carried out. In any case, the response would itself have to be phenomenological; I mean, it would entail not only answering what phenomenology is, but doing this by how we undertake it.

What about the Phenomenology Research Center at Stony Brook? What do you do there?

A.S.: The style of phenomenology that we carry out at the Center began when I was in Carbondale, about 20-25 years ago. It started quite innocently when I was teaching a graduate seminar on Husserl's *Passive Synthesis*. This is a wonderful text, full of concrete analyses and intricate distinctions, and evocative descriptions. In the middle of the seminar, somebody asked me "how do you do phenomenology?" I thought to myself that I must really be doing a disservice to the students: "How can we be reading such a powerful work in which Husserl is carrying out phenomenology, and yet somehow they are not learning how to do phenomenology?" At that time, I held my seminars in cafés, so I suggested that we meet on another day in a different café, and "do" phenomenology. (It was at that time that I was starting to look into the matter of religious experience and at the same time, the emotions.)

One condition of the gathering was that we did not (initially) refer to texts or authors—even Husserl; we would have to give examples of everything we proposed or described, and we had to be willing to rework our "results" on the basis of new descriptions that were more evocative or more in evidence. I remember not wanting to talk about our perception of a cup on the table, or some such example. It thought it would be more helpful to take up an emotional experience, and of one that was not frequented in phenomenology, namely, hoping. Employing distinctions we learned from Husserl, but eventually extending these analyses in new directions, we considered the temporal

meaning and temporal orientation of this experience, how it was or was not related to expectation (and eventually its relation of founding vis-à-vis a thetic act like expectation), if it was related to the past or present, and if so how or how not. Eventually, in subsequent weeks and months, we examined its relation to belief-assertions like optimism, its bearing on otherness, its relation to other acts like imagination, wishing, desiring, willing, how it concerns modalizations and relations to possibility. These questions emerged quite spontaneously, in discussions, through examples, via revisions, without relying on “what Husserl said.” We did not begin with definitions, but with everyday linguistic clues—as it turns out—but then submitted them to more critical investigations. During each session, I took (and still take) notes; I then reworked them, reflected on them, write them up, and distribute them to all the participants. It was, and continues to be very difficult work. [One of my former students, Fabricio Pontin—who is now a professor in Brazil—organized and collated these notes—at least up until about 10 years ago, so that they could be accessible in the PRC Archives.]

The meetings today are no longer in a café, but in the Center. But we do keep the café atmosphere by beginning each meeting with coffee tasting, using different coffees from various processing methods and roasters, as well as various brewing methods.

It reminded us of Husserl's relation with tobacco, as he calls “tobaccology” in one of his letters.

A.S.: That’s great; I did not know that. Regarding the style of phenomenology that is carried out in the Center, I can say that it emerged in the way that it did in part by virtue of the phenomena that we were addressing. I don’t think that the orientation, distinctions, questions, or points of entry would have surfaced in the way they did, had we begun, for example, with cups and tables. Although we were informed by the meticulous work offered by Husserl, what developed was not from a pre-set method.

Lastly, may we ask about what you read these days? What is your next project?

A.S.: I continue to read (and reread) Husserl, of course, and Scheler. But I am also inspired by Latin American literature and the work in phenomenology that is coming out in Spanish speaking countries through an inspiring younger generation of phenomenologists in, e.g., Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Spain, Peru, Columbia, but also in the Portugese language in Brazil and Portugal. Phenomenology seems to be alive there in distinctive ways. In addition to this, my new project is on vocational experience. In some ways, *Knowing by Heart* has been a preface to this work. The tentative title of this work is *Whispers of the Heart: Proper Names, Vocations, and Exemplars*. As you might surmise from the tentative title, this project has led me to investigate the proper name and to appreciate its development in the analytic tradition (which also had one of its early conversation-points in a dialogue between Husserl and Frege). There is much more to be said here, and there is a fruitful dialogue to be developed between a phenomenology of the proper name and the conversations that arose within the analytic tradition. But that's for another occasion.

Thank you so much.

Anthony Steinbock obtained his doctorate from Stony Brook University (1993) and studied at L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, France supported by the *Bourse Chateaubriand* (1989-1990), and at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany on a grant from the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* [DAAD] (1987-1989). He has taught at the University of New Hampshire, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and has held visiting professorships at several international institutions. His published books include: *Knowing by Heart: Loving as Participation and Critique* (2021), *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidence of the Heart* (2014), *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience* (2007/2009), *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl* (1995).

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