META

**Research in Hermeneutics,
Phenomenology &
Practical Philosophy**

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META: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy

Table of contents

BOOK REVIEW

Banging on the Open Door of Heaven
GHEORGHE CECAN
(Peter Sloterdijk, *Making the Heavens Speak: Religion as Poetry*,
Translated by Robert Hughes, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023, 288 p.)
Pages: 535-541

Consciousness Across Cultures: Phenomenological and Indian
Philosophical Insights in *Waking, Dreaming, Being*
AYUSH SRIVASTAVA
(Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness
in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge
University Press, 18th November 2014 (496 pp., US $22.95
(*Paperback*) US $32.95 (*hardcover*) US $21.99 (*ebook*), ISBN:
9780231136952 9780231137096)
Pages: 542-548

Note de lecture : Eric Weil, *Philosopher avec* Critique
CORNELIU BILBA
(Éric Weil, *Philosopher avec Critique*, Introduction, édition et notes par
Patrice Canivez, Gilbert Kirscher et Sylvie Patron, Librairie
Philosophique J. Vrin, 2023, 773 p.)
Pages: 549-560

Research Articles

The Phenomenology of Liturgical We

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenological structure of liturgical experience, highlighting the role and function of affectivity in constituting the sense and feeling of "us" in liturgy. First, it emphasizes the role of a plurality of pre-reflective bodily awareness of each other as one of the minimal preconditions for the affective constitution of a liturgical "we". Second, considering the corporate nature of worship and the theological primacy of the "we" in liturgy, it elaborates on the proposal that affective experiential structure of it hinges on the constitutive interdependence of I, you, and we, rejecting an undifferentiated homogeneity of the liturgical we.

Keywords: phenomenology, affectivity, liturgy, theology, We

Introduction: Liturgy as Ritual

The term 'liturgy' before assuming a religious meaning in Christianity, in ancient Greece designated a certain obligation imposed by the city-state on wealthy citizens to provide certain services for the common good at their own expense.[1] Etymologically, it derives from the Greek "leitourgia", which is a composite of two Greek words: "Laos"

(people) and "Ergon" (work), and literally means "public work". Christians perform liturgy as one of the most significant ritual practices, which implies the participation in the sacred mystery by performing collective prayers, chants, acts of repentance, and other types of ritual. Liturgical practices create an interpersonal affective atmosphere, opening the horizon for getting closer to the divine. Apart from this purely sacred role and dimension of liturgy as a divine worship, it constitutes a special kind of communal identity. Members of this community are united not only by shared beliefs but are intrinsically bound together by sharing affective moods, attunement, and atmosphere. According to Gschwandtner, "The ritual structures of liturgy, especially in their focus on imitation and examples, serve to make us one of many, to absorb our peculiarity and self-absorption into the larger "I" or "we" of liturgy so as to free us from ourselves and open us up to each other" (Gschwandtner 2019, 163-164).

According to Senn, liturgy is "a communal ritual response to the sacred through activity reflecting praise, thanksgiving, supplication, or repentance…The rituals serve as the means of establishing a relationship with a divine agency, as well as with other participants in the liturgy" (Senn, 2012: 5). And as Gschwandtner remarks, "In liturgy, our finite and fragile selves are welcomed into the plural experience of the community" (Gschwandtner 2019, 166).

Many theologians have emphasized the specific communal character of liturgy. They have also reflected on the intersubjective relationships among the members of a religious communion, arguing for their unification in the body of the Christ. In liturgy, physical co-presence of believers forms a type of religious communion. They are unified not only by shared cognitive and practical intentional attitudes, but their sense of unity in the first-person plural form may also be constituted through shared affective experiences. Thus, how and in what ways can one share the certain affective experience and what specific affective state is at work during the participation in ritual of liturgy? Attending liturgy, one might experience what German Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann called the "joy in existence" and "ecstasy of

happiness" (Müller-Fahrenholz 2000, 88). Full-fledged membership in religious communion is not bound to physical co-presence of faithful individuals, while liturgy as recollection and reenactment of the primordial mystery of Christ presupposes the physical proximity of bodies. One cannot be so sure, however, that participating in a communal liturgical ceremony will necessarily be accompanied by singular or shared affective experience. One might attend the liturgy without being able to feel or experience certain emotions or other affective components. Being emotionally detached from liturgical ritual does not always lead to doubts about belonging to a specific religious community. However, it does reduce the emotional and experiential identification with the group. When we think of liturgy as a ritual, it brings to mind Durkheim's early sociological theory on elementary forms of religious life. Durkheim emphasized the social nature of religious experiences and attributed the function of group solidarity to rituals. He also included an emotional element in rituals, which gives rise to collective emotional excitement that serves as the binding force of communal solidarity.

> Rituals are designed to arouse a passionate intensity, feelings of "effervescence," in which individuals experience something larger than themselves. These emotional responses cause people to identify their innermost selves with this sense of a larger reality, what is, in effect, the collective community in a disguised form (Bell 2009, 24).

Indeed, rituals range from everyday behavioral habits to much more complex, socially mediated actions that may have a purely symbolic character. Liturgy, as one of the most sophisticated and rule-based rituals, is historically and culturally formed. It presupposes a shared, collective performance of certain preordained ritual roles, such as prayer and chanting. Out of these roles, or simultaneously with them, an affective experience might emerge. However, whether this affective experience remains on a singular level, being exclusively part of the self and inaccessible to others, is a complex question. Liturgy is an embodied experience and it may also involve interbodily resonance. Participating in liturgy can enhance the sense of group membership. However, beyond this, as a specific type of ritual, its manifest aim is to repeat the

initial sacred experience. In other words, it involves the collective remembrance and actualization of Christ as the head of the body-church.[2] Apart from its manifest aim, liturgical celebration might also have a latent integrative function. According to Robert Merton's distinction, manifest functions are those that are intended and recognized by members. Conversely, latent functions are those that are unintended and of which participants are unaware (Merton 1968, 105). The latent function of performing various joint activities in liturgy is to provide a sense of belonging to the group. However, even this integrative process would not be possible without assembled bodies and synchronized co-prayer and co-chanting, out which a certain affective state might emerge.

Rituals are normatively grounded in the performance of subjects in accordance with prescribed conventions. They serve to maintain the integrity of time, actualizes the past in the present and are directed towards the future. Robert Taft, a scholar of liturgy and church historian, summarizes this idea as follows:

> Ritual is a set of conventions, an organized pattern of signs and gestures which members of a community used to interpret and enact for themselves, and to express and transmit to others, their relation to reality. It is a way of saying that we as a group are, with our past that made us what we are, our present in which we live what we are and the future we hope to be (Taft 1997, 162).

Thus, liturgy as an enactment of primordial experience is a specific shared situation, generating the sense of temporal cohesion and forming an identity of the group and its self-understanding through collective memory of both profane and sacred time. Liturgy as a ritual, according to Taft, is dependent "on the group's collective remembrance of things past" (Taft 1997, 162), which serves as a binding glue for a community as a whole.

1. Pre-Reflective Bodily Awareness in Liturgy

Liturgy is an embodied practice. Bodies may be in both passive and active positions. They do not stand still; rather, during participation in liturgy, they respond to the words and actions performed by priests. According to Gschwandtner,

bodies do not merely stay within the Church. Instead, by practicing litany-that is, collective walking around the certain sacred object or around the Church itself-they ultimately receive a communion in sanctuary.

> Walking becomes worship. Each time anew, the body must enter into the liturgical space, cross the threshold between narthex and nave, approach the sanctuary for the reception of communion (Gschwandtner 2019, 81).

Participation in liturgy does not always imply mutual awareness and eye to eye contact. The presence of another body might be felt pre-reflectively, without cognitive appraisal. One can be pre-reflectively affected by the presence of other bodies and, while being focused on the content of prayer or chanting, co-laterally experience an affective interbodily atmosphere and concomitant bodily phenomena. These phenomena can include hearing other's breath, shivering, feeling warmth coming from other bodies, whispering, or uneasiness. However, pre-reflective bodily awareness of others cannot be the sufficient requirement for producing the communion. Rather, it can be a minimal precondition for generating affective dispositions and subsequent sharing of them among the participants of the liturgy. According to Randal Collins;

> When human bodies are together in the same place, there is a physical attunement: currents of feeling, a sense of wariness or interest, a palpable change in the atmosphere. The bodies are paying attention to each other, whether at first there is any great conscious awareness of it or not. This bodily inter-orientation is the starting point for what happens next (Collins 2004, 34).

However, being physically co-present in one space, does not necessarily create the sense of "us". People might pray or chant alongside each other, but not necessarily together. There has to be something in common, or a unified principle, for the constitution of the sense of togetherness. One might raise the question regarding the appropriateness of affective sharing as a candidate for the constitution of "we", particularly within the context of liturgy. In this context, the level of anonymity must be taken seriously into account. From an outsider's perspective, an assembled congregation might appear as intrinsically unified community, sharing the same axiological patterns and

conative attitudes. Moreover, one might expect that they know each other and are mutually aware. Certainly, this might be the case, but in liturgy, one can maintain anonymity without disclosing oneself or being acknowledged by others. Randal Collins specified four ingredients of ritual: 1) Group Assembly 2) barrier to outsiders 3) mutual focus of attention 4) shared mood (Collins 2004, 48). Physical co-presence as a necessary requirement for successful enactment of liturgy, might presuppose foreground as well as background awareness of others. "Two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence, whether it is in the foreground of their conscious attention or not" (Collins, 2004: 48). Being reflectively aware in the perceptual presence of another person is not enough for an affective state to be shared. In the case of liturgy, the physical co-presence of a plurality of subjects does not always imply integration and common concern. Attending a ritual, subject might be disintegrated from others by being emotionally alienated and unable to be in tune with others. This would be the case of negative participation, when, one participates formally, without actually having a motivation to do so.

This is a reason to examine the second ingredient for ritual proposed by Collins, which is the barriers to outsiders. "There are boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded" (Collins 2004, 48). Does this mean that participants already know each other and define themselves as the "we"? If that is the case, then liturgical communion would be limited only to those who actively take part in it. However, liturgy is also performed for absent people, thus it exceeds mere physical engagement. To summarize this insight, the liturgical "we" is a much broader and more overarching phenomenon than its particular forms of enactment. Romano Guardini, in his analysis of the peculiarities of liturgy and worship, stated that Christian "we" is not limited and circumscribed by the physical attendance of members in a church. Rather the "we" is above and beyond any assembly. Thus, Guardini writes:

> Until now we have spoken of congregation as the Christian "we" in its encounter with God, the community of those united by the same

faith and by mutual love. But this is not all. The conception must include also those outside any particular building, even outside the church, for congregation reaches far beyond (Guardini 1997, 134).

Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas also endorses the view that liturgy addresses not only those who attend the ceremony, but also encompasses those outside of a church. Thus, when analyzing the importance of the Eucharist during pandemics and the necessity of the presence of at least a few believers during the service, Zizioulas assessed that:

A community (κοινωνία and κοινότητα) is never complete in terms of the participation of the entire community. There is always a minority present; however, it still represents and acts on behalf of all those who are absent.[3]

However, presence and participation in liturgy have paramount importance for experiential identification with each other and with the given congregation via collectively performing chants, prayers, or acts of repentance. Undoubtedly, a physically absent person still aligns with the liturgical communion, but in that case, the mutual focus and awareness of each other's experiences would be lost.

Bodily presence makes it easier for human beings to monitor each other's signals and bodily expressions; to get into shared rhythm, caught up in each other's motions and emotions; and to signal and confirm a common focus of attention and thus a state of intersubjectivity (Collins 2004, 64).

Even without being entrained affectively in the very process of liturgy and reluctantly repeating words and actions, there is still something like tacit interbodily resonance among participants. Other bodies are implicitly resonating with me, their presence might be experienced pre-reflectively, as if we are tacitly tracking each other's postures, gazes or movements. Being pre-reflectively aware in the bodily presence of others is the most rudimentary level of other-relatedness. In a pre-reflective experience of other bodies, participants are not taken to be embodied objects, rather they implicitly experience each other as co-subjects. [4] Pre-reflective awareness of others in liturgy might create the sense of "us", or implicit shared identification with a given religious community. Liturgy as corporate worship of God, does not have to be understood in

terms of ontologically extended body, or plural subjectivity having its own peculiar form of existence, beyond and above of changing members of congregation. Participation in liturgy is not solitary, but shared experience, when subjects pre-reflectively monitor and track each other's bodily movements. Pre-reflective bodily awareness of others precedes more complex mechanisms of experiential unification by reflectively performing joint activities, such as chanting and praying. However, during that minimal pre-reflective experiential dimension, there may not be any mutual awareness of each other's experiences at all. Instead of reciprocal other awareness as one of the basic conditions for experiential sharing, on that pre-reflective level of bodily self and other awareness, there might be an interbodily mimicry. According to Ciaunica:

> When we engage with others, there is a pre-reflective layer of implicit bodily coupling at work through involuntarily synchronizing with the mimicking of the gestures, facial and bodily expressions of others (Ciaunica 2005, 433).

Liturgical intersubjectivity thus presupposes unthematized and pre-predicative awareness of the presence of other bodies. There is some kind of presumed interbodily dialogue among participants, which includes what Ciaunica calls involuntary synchronization of varieties of bodily movements.

I would assume that pre-reflective bodily feedback might be considered as the most elementary or minimal level for producing the sense and feeling of liturgical communion. Spatial proximity of bodies, tacitly or subliminally monitoring each other, does not necessarily imply the face-to-face encounter and what Alfred Schutz called "Other-orientation". For it requires the conscious recognition of Other not as anonymous "he" or "she" among the plurality of participating subjects, but as "thou", to whom, according to Schutz, I can form the "pure We-relationship".

> The face-to-face relationship in which the partners are aware of each other and sympathetically participate in each other's lives for however short a time we shall call the "pure We-relationship" (Schutz 1967, 164).

Pre-reflective bodily awareness of others, despite having entailed immediacy of co-presence, does not amount to reciprocal I-thou relatedness and remains unthematized possibility for transition to the "we" communion. To what extent can one speak about integrated "we" communion of liturgy? What has been analyzed above, namely, pre-predicative interbodily experience, instantiates only one component for constituting the sense of "us". Liturgy as first and foremost embodied and embedded practice is plural in its nature, but there has to be some supplementary affective and cognitive mechanisms at play, which would enable to form the "we", or liturgical communion. Embodied plurality of liturgy does not yet represent the "we". Plurality without integration and experiential endorsement of belonging can be compared to the type of collectivity, which Sartre called "seriality".

Seriality implies substitutability of subjects, who does not recognize each other and are not integrated as a group having some common unified principle. They are atomized and "do not care about or speak to each other and, in general, they do not look at one another; they exist side by side alongside a bus stop" (Sartre 2004, 256).

Body is forming the space and environment, but at the same time is formed by externality too. My existence is hinged upon the body, I cannot be outside of it and I am able to experience my bodily self only from within as mine, having privileged or exclusive access to my intrabodily sensations. Interoception is the first-person bodily awareness of internal states such as sensation of hunger. According to Bermúdez "Bodiliy sensations certainly provide one of the ways in which we are aware of our bodies from the inside" (Bermúdez 2013, 159), while proprioception apart from being conscious physiological element of knowing the positions of body parts might also be non-conscious. According to Gallagher and Zahavi;

> I have a tacit sense of the space that I am in (whether it is crowded, whether it is wide open, or whether it is closing in). Likewise, I have a proprioceptive sense of whether I am sitting or standing, stretching or contracting my muscles. Of course, these postural and positional senses of where and how the body is tend to remain in the background of my awareness; they are tacit, recessive. They are what

phenomenologists call a 'pre-reflective sense of myself as embodied (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 136).

While there are first-person conscious and unconscious forms of bodily awareness, it is still confined by and centered to one's own body and does not provide information regarding tacit comprehension of external objects and other bodies. Exteroception despite also being centered on the body, might be considered as non-conceptual awareness of external world, as Mezue and Makin pointed out "exteroceptive perceptions include sensory aspects such as touch, temperature, and vibration" (Mezue and Makin 2017, 34).

In the liturgical space, assembled bodies, despite keeping a distance, might even accidentally touch each other, or feel the temperature or vibration between the bodies. However, one aspect has to be noted again: the plurality of bodies and their pre-reflective awareness does not yet constitute the consciously approved sense of "us". In the next section, I will address the following question: What are those necessary conditions which have to be fulfilled in order to share an affective experience?

2. Affective sharing and Liturgical We

What type of "we" exists in liturgy, and does it have an affective constitution? If liturgy is a shared or collective worshiping of God, where can this sharedness be located? French philosopher Jean-Yves Lacoste's raised the question: "When we pray, what is this "we" that prays? (Lacoste 2005, 93). For Lacoste, the liturgical experience blurs the line between the subject and object. The "we" is, first and foremost an "coeffective experience" (Lacoste 2005, 93). Drawing on the classical phenomenology, particularly on Heidegger and Husserl, Lacoste states that "we exist in the plural" and "the world is a shared world, a with-world. The Other was always already present in it, and present as other ego" (Lacoste 2005, 94-96). But does being with others in a "shared world" amount to "we"? I think, and it has been already elaborated by Gerda Walther, being together with others does not necessarily presuppose intrinsic membership of community as well as the "we", especially in liturgy, in which, as Lacoste claims,

dichotomy between "subject" and "object" no longer exists. For Lacoste collective prayer assumes what he calls "an act of communion", which is an affective in nature.

> Those who pray together undertake an act of communion. This communion is the fact of the living among them, it is also the fact of the living and the dead, the assembly of those who are and those who were, a unity that knows no barrier, neither temporal nor spatial…The "we" is here self-evident, and in a rich way, that of a possible communion. But it is not so self-evident that the existence of this "we" is translated indubitably into the life of the affects (Lacoste 2005, 99-100).

What does it all mean? Why does "we" have to be translated into affects? Lacoste highlights that sharing affective experiences with others is not deprived of affective components, but he does not pay much attention to the constitutive function of affections in joint activities forming the liturgical "we".

> To be at peace with the Other, to rejoice that he is there, and (if need be) to share his suffering with him: there is no lack of affective tonalities that would witness a "with" lived as communion (Lacoste 2005, 101).

In contrast to this picture of the interrelatedness of coaffection and liturgy, which does not say much about the "we", I would like to endorse the view that the proper candidate for the constitution of the "we" might be an affective sharing. Coaffection does not necessarily imply mutuality or reciprocal awareness of each other's affective states. It presupposes the existence of a shared situation and a certain focus, out of which an affective experience is produced.

I would like to proceed by taking on the account proposed by Dan Zahavi, that for having the sense of "us" or we-experience, emotional contagion and empathy do not seem to be plausible; rather, the proper candidate for the constitution of we might be what Max Scheler called emotional sharing ("Mitfühlen," or "Miteinanderfühlen") (Zahavi 2015). Emotional contagion should not be considered as the premise for the constitution of liturgical we, because, as it has been supposed, it is "self-centered" (de Vignemont 2009, 63), whereas in liturgy, communion with fellow believers and Christ rests upon an unconditional love and self-donation. The jointness of liturgical action, whether it be a collective prayer or collective chanting,

presupposes synchronicity and coordination among participants, which also implies tacit awareness of others, constituting together with me what I call liturgical communion. The distinctive feature of affective sharing in liturgy is that it goes beyond dyadic reciprocation, implying reflective awareness of each other's affective experience. Affective states can be shared across a plurality of participants by virtue of being directed together at the same focus and unified by the commonality of evaluative attitudes. Affective sharing in liturgy would not be possible without plurality and integration of participants, who are interdependent on each other, and by preserving the self and other differentiation co-constitute liturgical we. Liturgical communion being formed by affective sharing neither amounts to fusion nor to affective segregation and is not reducible to an aggregation of individuals either. As Zahavi pointed out:

> "You cannot be a member of a we without somehow affirming or endorsing that membership experientially. To be part of a we, you have to experience it from within" (Zahavi 2021, 13).

Though Zahavi did not imply and specify liturgical we, his take on can be equally applied to religious phenomena. According Gschwandtner, "liturgical selves experiences themselves first within the context of community, in a prepared and oriented space and time, which precedes them and provides horizons of experience that enable intentionality" (Gschwandtner 2019, 166). Gschwandtner seems to claim that liturgical self does not exist outside of community and is experientially depended upon it.

But, why not to consider an opposite view that the liturgical community itself is possible by means of affirmative experience and identification of self with it? Neither I would like to suggest the primacy of liturgical "we", nor some form of solipsistic account. Instead, my proposal is that, if affective sharing is a proper candidate for the constitution of the" we", one does not have to overlook the role of relational structure of experience composed by I, you and "we". Collective worship of God does not abolish the difference between I and you, as well as worshiping the God by me and you within the context of corporate liturgy does not diminish, rather makes the liturgical "we" possible.

In a recent article on the taxonomy of collective emotions, Gerhard Thonhauser delineated four structural features for enactment of collective affective experience: 1) Collective evaluative perspective; 2) Collective appraisal; 3) a sense of togetherness; 4) self and other awareness (Thonhauser 2022, 31). I am not going to discuss all of these structural components in detail here, but drawing on Thonhauser's taxonomy, I would like to emphasize that among emotional contagion, emotional matching, emotional segregation and emotional fusion a sharing of emotional as well as an affective experience in its broader sense corresponds to all of these four structural features. Participants of a liturgy have a collective evaluative perspective, that is to say, they "share a pattern of corresponding concerns" (Thonhauser 2022, 37), this, together with what Thonhauer calls "dynamical self-organization" leads towards a collective appraisal of situation, meaning an experience of same or similar type of affection. A sense of togetherness implies that participants experience the joy or effervescence as a collective, the joy is experienced neither by me nor by you, rather collectively as our joy. I would like to add that, apart from a sense of togetherness, one might argue that there is also a feeling of togetherness as Gerda Walther would put it, which is an affective in nature. Thonhauser does not conceive of a sense of togetherness in terms of a collective mind as it was a case in crowd psychology. The last in this list is self and other awareness. To experience affection collectively does not abolish the difference between self and other. Affective sharing presupposes at least tacit monitoring of each other and reciprocal awareness, "they are in a situation of joint attention, experiencing each other as co-subject of the collective experience" (Thonhauser 2022, 37).

3. Liturgical We: Theological Account

In both catholic and orthodox theological traditions there is a tendency to endorse the primacy of "we" in liturgy. It would be more evident when looking at the synchronized corporate activities such as joint prayer and polyphonic chanting, both in western and eastern Christian traditions. The liturgical text and practice itself is plural in nature, but does

this plurality should to be understood in aggregative way or it has to be conceived of as having formed phenomenal collective body? One of the leading voices of liturgical movement, catholic priest and theologian, Romano Guardini endorsed extremely corporate conception of assembly in liturgical practice. Guardini clarifies that in liturgy the primacy has been given to first person plural form. According to him, "As a rule we is used: we praise thee. we glorify thee. we adore thee; forgive us. help us. enlighten us. This we is not spontaneous. But the carefully nurtured fruit of genuine congregation" (Guardini 1997, 133). Guardini also insisted that liturgy does not rest with "collective groups" composed of variety of individuals (Guardini 1997, 140-141).

What then is the meaning of liturgy and does it have the unified body, which is not reducible to mere aggregation of individual participants, rather instantiates certain phenomenal commonality, or, what Guardini calls "corporate body", which "infinitely outnumbers the mere congregation" (Guardini 197, 141). This hyper communitarian account of liturgy seems to eliminate the constitutive role of interpersonal I-thou relation, which is a subject-subject relation. Instead, there is something like phenomenal fusion of individuals in liturgical "we", or in an all-encompassing and comprehensive "selfless objectivity" (Guardini 197, 138), this is the reason why "liturgy does not say "I," but "We"." (Guardini 197, 136). However, Guardini seems to be oscillating between aggregative and holistic accounts of liturgy, as on the next page, he insisted that individual members are not merged with a whole, rather "they are added to it" (Guardini 197, 139), which complicates and makes his argument even more obscure. According to Guardini, union of members "is accomplished by and in their joint aim. goal and spiritual resting place - God - by their identical creed. sacrifice and sacrament" (Guardini 197, 139). In another passage, Guardini reflects about Christ as the fundamental principle of communion or unification. Referring to St Paul's epistles he writes, "His life is ours; we are incorporated in Him; we are His Body, "Corpus Christi mysticum" (Guardini 197, 136).

As lesser well-knows Gerda Walther also pointed out, for having something like community, there has to be an "inner bond" (innere verbundenheit) (Walther 1923, 33) and "feeling of

togetherness" (*Gefühl der Zusammengehörigkeit*) (Walther 1923, 33). Dominik Zelinsky analyzing Walther's explicit engagement with Max Weber, especially regarding his theory of charisma, pays attention to the passage from Walther's dissertation, where she writes that "every genuine Christian must […] feel a priori connected with all other genuine Christians, and they with him, albeit not as individual but "as a Christian'" (Walther 1923, 84).

Therefore, the principle of communal unification here is identification with Christian co-believers, which does not require knowing something about each other. As in case of liturgical assembly discussed above, when participants do not necessarily know each other. The reason of being the "we" is their shared system of believe. Liturgical community is structurally very similar to what Walther calls communities "in and for itself" (Walther 1923, 84). For that type of community, which does not have an aim outside of itself and does not operate instrumentally as temporal association, the members have to refer to the same intentional object, they have to know each other (*Wissen-von-einander*) and be aware of other's same intentional directedness towards an object and because of that knowledge, they might reciprocally affect each other (*Wechselwirkung miteinander*) (Walther 1923, 29; Mühl 2018, 21; Szanto 2018, 93). In liturgy participating subjects might be co-affected, but for forming liturgical communion, it is not necessary for them to know each other. What is a constituent element of an inner bond? As Leon and Zahavi explicated, Walther sought to explain an inner bond not by looking at an impact of members on each other, but through the concept of reciprocal unification (*Wechseleinigung*) which is an affective in character (Leon, Zahavi 2018, 229). Inner unification or joining happens through affective identification, it is a matter of feeling rather than "an act of cognition (*Erkenntnisakt*) or judgment (*Urteil*)" (See: Walther 1923, 34; Leon, Zahavi 2018, 229; Mühl 2018, 21). According to Mühl, Walther's account of social communities might be interpreted as a hybrid model: "Walther combines an ontological individualism with an ontological holism such that a community is both the sum of its members and an independent social entity" (Mühl 2018, 20). Knowing of

each other (*Wissen-um-einander*), according to Szanto, "does not carry much cognitive overload…Rather; it is a non-reflective knowledge of my fellow members' intentional and affective lives" (Szanto 2018, 94). This appraisal perfectly corresponds to the proposal of pre-reflective bodily awareness of others in liturgy, which I have discussed above. Moreover, the German (*Wissen-um-einander*) has a richer meaning and might be understood not only in terms of direct reciprocal knowledge of co-presented individuals, but something more, it is a background knowledge of other's experience.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger develops Guardini's line of thought and endorses the primacy of "we" over "I". Ratzinger referring to Galatians 3:16 wrote: "My "I" is transformed and opens up into the great "we", so that we become "one" in him "(Ratzinger 2000, 90). It also resembles certain phenomenal fusion[5] of multitude into one single body, where all differences and identity markers are blurred.

According to Ratzinger, Christian liturgy is essentially communal in nature and is performed not separately by individual believers but within the context of community. In liturgical context, without conceptually distinguishing them from each other, Ratzinger ascribes the primacy of "we" and "you" over "I". Ratzinger's line of though is phenomenologically inconsistent, because he missed the point that "you" also takes the perspective of "I", "you" does not exist without "I" and "you" is always already an "I". Cardinal Ratzinger claims that "Eucharistic personalism" is certain drive or ground for unification and "overcoming of barriers between God and man, between "I" and "thou" in the new "we" of the communion of saints" (Ratzinger 2000, 87). However, overcoming of barriers does not necessarily imply an elimination of difference between God and man, between "I" and "Thou". Even analyzing the role of art regarding liturgy, Ratzinger maintains that creative or producing subjectivity is hinged upon the Church; "No sacred art can come from an isolated subjectivity. No, it presupposes that there is a subject who has been inwardly formed by the Church and opened up to the "we" (Ratzinger 2000, 134).

According to Miroslav Volf, "Ratzinger locates the essence of the church in the arc between the self and the whole;

it is the communion between the human "I" and the divine "Thou" in a universally communal "We" (Volf 1998, 30). Volf's take on is that Ratzinger conceives of the universal church as "I" to which laity is bound in the form of liturgical "we". Accomplishment of the goal of liturgy, that is to say representation of Christ, is not only priest's responsibility; believers have to participate actively in worship by jointly performing prayers and chants. Volf remarks that "the subject of the liturgical event is "precisely the assembled congregation as a whole; the priest is the subject only insofar as he co-embodies this subject and is its interpreter "(Volf 1998, 62). Volf himself stands on the different ground and does not share with Ratzinger universalistic account of liturgical communion:

> Communal liturgical expression requires that it be individually internalized without such internalization, a person plays merely a communal "role" at the celebration of the liturgy, which can only mean that this person's communion with others and so also with the triune God is merely "pretended communion (Volf 1998, 65-66).

However, it is not clear, what exactly Volf means by internalization, does he suggest that first and foremost, individual participant should live through the liturgy itself? It seems that answer to this question would be positive. One might say that Volf endorses some kind of methodological individualism by acknowledging the constitutive primacy of individual experience over group. Otherwise, it turns out to be mere instrument for liturgical performance, incapable of constituting authentic communion with others. Volf conceives of the ontology of church by endorsing plurality of it and criticizing totalizing narratives regarding the constitution of universal church. This is the reason, why he wrote that "the church is not a "We"; the church are we" (Volf 1998, 10).

Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas developing certain theological personalism drawing on the eastern patristic tradition, states that "in the New Testament the Eucharist is Communion" (Zizioulas 2011, 35), but this Eucharistic communion is not corporate merging of many in one body, rather "personal existence in the context of communion" (Zizioulas 2011, 35). According to Zizioulas, Eucharist "makes each one fully capable of saying 'I', but always in relation to

'you' and 'us'" (Zizioulas 2011, 35). Thus, Eucharistic communion does not instantiate the constitutive primacy of "we" over "I". "We" does not precede an "I", rather, one can assume that they might be equiprimordial. This horizontal, or relational structure of Eucharistic communion perfectly corresponds[6] to Martin Buber's insightful assessment, which has been noted by Dan Zahavi, that "Only men who are capable of truly saying Thou to one another can truly say We with one another"[7] (Buber 2002, 208). Zahavi also pointed out that similar account can be found in the works of classical phenomenologists such as Husserl and Schutz (Zahavi 2021, 17). Guardini's idea of liturgy as "selfless objectivity" stands in an obvious opposition to Buber's account of "we", as for Buber nameless and faceless crowd "in which I am entangled is not a We but the "one". But as there is a Thou so there is a We" (Buber 2002, 208). For being able to refer to each other as "we", first and foremost one has to relate to one another as I and thou.

But how is it possible in liturgy, to acknowledge and relate to an anonymous "other" as "thou"? Does it mean that "we" of liturgy rests on the recognition of each other? Participants of liturgy do have something in common and they mutually focus an attention to common object, but it is not always the case that they know each other in person. Out of this theoretical predicament one question arises, to what extent can liturgical "we" be formed without reciprocal awareness and recognition of each other? Buber speaks about other structures within which a requirement of knowing of each other, or relating to one another in terms of I-thou does not take place, but it still amounts to "we". According to Buber, "there are still other, remarkable structures which include men hitherto unknown to one another, and which are at least very close to the essential We" (Buber 2002, 209). But what kind of "essential we" is it? Is it robust or fragile? Is it temporarily persistent or fluid? I would like to differentiate between actual and potential "we" of liturgy. Actual "we" of liturgy is its very performance, its collective and joint enactment by reading, praying and chanting together, while potential, or anonymous "we" of liturgy, exceeds physical co-presence of faithful individuals as it refers to those who are absent and might be

potentially referred to as one of "us". It would be interesting to note that not only collective or joint action constitutes the sense of "us" in liturgy, but everything practiced individually, according to Zizioulas, "cease to be 'mine' and become 'ours' […] The Eucharist is not only communion between each person and Christ, it is also communion among the faithful themselves" (Zizioulas 201, 128).

4. Conclusion

The primacy of "we" and the form of the corporate worship in liturgy has been widely acknowledged by theologians. Liturgical communion as a specific shared situation is produced not only by having a focus on common intentional object, but also through jointness and synchronicity of performance such as a collective form of a prayer, chanting and repentance. This leads towards an emergence of an affective experience, sharing of which among participants might be considered as a proper candidate for the constitution of the liturgical communion. I think, first and foremost identification with concrete liturgical "we" proceeds from an affective experience. I did not argue against plural nature of liturgy, but instead of ascribing an overwhelming primacy of "we" over "I" and "thou", I propose to conceive of the liturgical "we" as a relational entity which does not abolish the difference between self and other. However, one does not have to neglect a radical case too, when, for example, due to the strong identification with "selfless objectivity" of congregation, one tends be fused in it without maintaining autonomy and subjectivity.

NOTES

[1] For more detailed historical reconstruction of the genealogy of liturgy see (Senn 2012).
[2] Mirchea Eliade stated that "Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, "in the beginning." Religious participation in a festival implies emerging from ordinary temporal duration and reintegration of the mythical time reactualized by the festival itself" (Eliade 1987, 69).
[3] See full interview on the following website:

https://anglican.ink/2020/03/31/the-church-without-the-eucharist-is-not-the-church-interview-with-john-zizioulas/

[4] For Developmental account of self-awareness as co-awareness see Rochat (2004, 1–20). See also Ciaunica (2016, 422-438).

[5] An idea of fusion of individual members into the group and subsequent diminishing of individuality and differences among them can be already found in Gurwitsch (1979). Phenomenological fusion account has been developed also by Schmid (2009, 3-28). For more detailed analysis of Gurwitsch's position, see Zelinsky (2021).

[6] Zizioulas himself refers to Buber as well as to Berdyaev when he discusses the specific structure of "koinonia", which literary means a "common life". According to Zizioulas, the notion of "koinonia" is linked with the notion of a person, as "to be a person is to be in a communion. Without this communion, one is an individual, but not a person" (Zizioulas 2011, 21).

[7] For finding Buber's account, I am indebted to Zahavi (2021, 17).

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Knowing Beyond Objectification: Ricœur, Levinas, and the Phenomenology of Testimony

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Abstract

Paul Ricœur and Emmanuel Levinas both pose their accounts of testimony against Edmund Husserl's account of reflective consciousness, which posits the subject as a theorizing consciousness that transforms the exterior world into an interior object of knowledge. From their critiques of Husserl, Ricœur and Levinas present their own accounts of testimony which disrupt the dichotomy of subject and object, lending themselves to a deeper engagement between the listener and the testifier. However, Ricœur's account of testimony does not go far enough in challenging the framework of knowing subject and object of knowledge, while Levinas' account makes the mistake of erasing the specificity of another person in an attempt to provide an account of the unintelligible. I propose that Hans-Georg Gadamer's work on dialogue can bridge the gap between Ricœur and Levinas' work on testimony. I will conclude that a compelling account of the relationship between the self and others should preserve the other's alterity while positioning the other as an interlocutor who has the power to shape the self's own understandings. This framework elevates testimony to a source of meaning in and of itself by acting as an entrance point into an ethical relationship with the other and by providing an opportunity for the self's own understandings to be changed in light of what the other has to say.

Keywords: testimony, Ricoeur, Levinas, Gadamer, dialogue

Introduction

Philosophy traditionally investigates testimony - that is, a person recounting an experience or belief - as a secondary way of obtaining knowledge. Whoever encounters another person's testimony has indirect access to the first-hand experience of the testifier. Testimony is therefore only valuable in so far as it can effectively transmit information to a subject (Van Der Heiden

2022, 315). This approach to testimony positions the listener as a subject who approaches both testimony and the testifier as an object of knowledge. Applying the dichotomy of subject and object to testimony is problematic as it places the listener in the position of a subject who can impose their own understanding of the world onto what the testifier says, while robbing the testifier of their own subjectivity. This removes the possibility of a relationship between listener and testifier as co-subjects, while also making it impossible for the listener to re-shape their own understanding of the world in light of what the testifier has to say. These critiques are at the heart of Paul Ricœur's and Emmanuel Levinas' work on testimony. In his essay, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," Ricœur argues that testimony disrupts the idea of self-consciousness by exposing the ways that our understanding of the world and ourselves is shaped by the testimony of others. In "Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony," Levinas argues that testimony is not found in the content of specific speech acts, but is inherent to any communication between the self and the other, where the act of speaking itself testifies to a responsibility for the other that defines the self. Both these accounts posit testimony as a source of meaning that is incompatible with a framework which treats the relationship between the self and the world as that of subject and object.

This paper will explore the ways that Ricœur and Levinas use the concept of testimony to demonstrate a deeper engagement between the self and others that extends beyond the framework of subject and object. Ricœur and Levinas both pose their accounts of testimony against Edmund Husserl's account of reflective consciousness, which posits the subject as a theorizing consciousness that transforms the exterior world into an interior object of knowledge. Both thinkers critique this framework: for Ricœur, the concept of reflection fails to capture the way that the subject is shaped by the world around it, and for Levinas, reflection reduces truth to what can be represented within consciousness. From these critiques, Ricœur and Levinas present their own accounts of testimony which disrupt the dichotomy of subject and object. However, while both thinkers point to a deeper engagement between the self and

others than that provided by reflection, Ricœur's account does not go far enough in challenging the framework of knowing subject and object of knowledge, while Levinas' account makes the mistake of erasing the specific claims that another person makes in an attempt to provide an account of the unintelligible. In response to these critiques, I propose that Hans George Gadamer's work on dialogue can bridge the gap between Ricœur and Levinas by both prioritizing the subjectivity of the other and taking the content of what the other has to say seriously. I will conclude that a compelling account of the relationship between the self and others should preserve the other's alterity while positioning the other as an interlocutor who has the power to shape the self's own understandings. This framework elevates testimony to a source of meaning in and of itself by acting as an entrance point into an ethical relationship with the other and by providing an opportunity for the self's own understandings to be changed in light of what the other has to say.

1. Background: Reflective Consciousness

In their work on testimony, Ricœur and Levinas respond to Husserl's concept of reflective consciousness. Reflection acts as a bridge between consciousness and the exterior world. In the Cartesian tradition, consciousness is independent of the material world. However, consciousness is also aware of the world around it. If consciousness and the world are separate from each other, but consciousness is conscious *of* the world, then there must be something that enables this awareness by bridging the gap between external objects and the interior world (Davidson 2013, 212). Husserl bridges this gap through reflection. Consciousness is aware of the world around it through sense perception (Von Herrmann 2013, 34). This awareness is both an awareness of the information given through sense perception – i.e. what things look like, feel like, sound like, etc. – and an awareness of the value or use of the things we perceive (Von Herrmann 2013, 34). Husserl calls this the natural attitude (Von Herrmann 2013, 68). To gain a theoretical understanding of the world given to consciousness through sense perception, consciousness must step out of this

attitude and consider the exterior world as an object of reflection (Von Herrmann 2013, 68). Consciousness grasps the exterior world and transforms it into an interior object that can be reflected on. Reflection thus points to a passage from the external world to the internal, and with this, a transformation of the exterior world into objects that exist within consciousness. To bridge the gap between consciousness and the world, consciousness makes the world its object.

Understood through the framework of reflection, testimony is primarily a mode of transmitting ideas and beliefs that consciousness can then grasp as objects of knowledge. Statements about experiences or beliefs are objects that the knowing subject can grasp and reflect upon. The person who gives testimony has an experience or belief that they transmit to the person listening. The listener can then take what is said as an intentional object and incorporate it into the interior world, where testimony becomes intelligible in consciousness. Levinas argues that in this way, testimony can only bring about "indirect truths" (Levinas 1996, 100) about something. The fact that knowledge is transmitted and not directly experienced makes knowledge acquired through testimony "evidently inferior" (Levinas 1996, 100). When the world is reduced to an object of knowledge that consciousness can take up, testimony is only valuable in so far as it can transmit knowledge.

The ways that the subject of testimony is taken up in philosophy reflect a view of testimony as a mode through which knowledge is transmitted. The first way that philosophy traditionally approaches testimony is through the lens of epistemology. This line of investigation seeks to determine whether testimony can transmit knowledge to the subject and whether the subject has "rational grounds and reasons for accepting testimony" (Van Der Heiden 2022, 312). In other words, epistemological approaches to testimony consider the validity of testimony as a source of information. An alternative approach accepts that testimony is a valid source of information and as such investigates the specific "truth-claim" that is at stake within testimony (Van Der Heiden 2022, 313). In both these approaches, testimony is primarily "a report… or a transmission of factual information or specific beliefs" (Van Der

Heiden 2022, 313). According to Levinas, testimony understood this way "illuminate only by way of borrowed light" (Levinas 1996, 100). Testimony is the transmission of meaning to a thinking subject and not a form of meaning in and of itself.

2. The Limits of Reflection

Ricœur's and Levinas' work on testimony reveal the limits of reflection. Ricœur argues that the framework of knowing subject and object of knowledge fails to capture the way that the subject's self-understanding is mediated by the world around them. Ricœur draws on Husserl's work to explain why consciousness necessarily refers to the exterior world. However, he argues that Husserl neglects the ways that the subject understands itself in light of this world. Ricœur argues that the "ideas, actions, works, institutions, and monuments" (Ricœur 1977, 28) that the subject encounters shape the way that the subject understands itself. Ricœur's work thus points to a limitation in Husserl's concept of reflection: "some experiences cannot be understood through direct reflection on the object but are mediated through 'signs, symbols, and texts'" (Davidson 2013, 221). Within reflection, the world becomes an object that is represented within consciousness. Once the world becomes an object of reflection, the subject can impose their own understanding on the exterior world. This contrasts sharply with Ricœur's approach, where the exterior world shapes the subject's own self-understanding, rather than the subject shaping the meaning of the world.

Ricœur's explanation of the relationship between the subject and a text provides an illustrative example of how the subject can understand itself in light of the world, rather than imposing its own understanding on it. One way to conceptualize the relationship between a reader and a text is as the reader imposing their own understanding onto what they read (Ricœur 1977, 30). According to this account, the text is the reader's object, and its meaning is shaped by the reader. Ricœur proposes that the opposite is true: the reader does not make the meaning of the text, but the self is instead "constituted by the issue of the text" (Ricœur 1977, 30). The reader comes to a new understanding of themselves and the world in light of what the

text has to say. Reading is therefore a process that involves "understanding oneself before the text" (Ricœur 1977, 30). This holds in a more general sense in contexts other than reading written works. Just as the self understands itself before the text, the self's self-understanding is shaped by the world it lives in and the people, ideas, and objects that it comes into contact with.

While Ricœur argues that Husserl's framework cannot capture the way that the subject is mediated by the world around it, Levinas argues that Husserl's framework cannot capture anything that is not intelligible. Husserl provides a conception of consciousness that grasps the exterior world and draws it into a structure of understanding within consciousness (Levinas 1996, 98). Anything that occurs in the world must be made into an intelligible object within the interior world of the knower (Levinas 1996, 98). This framework means that "representation governs the notion of truth" (Levinas 1996, 99). Only those things that can be represented within consciousness can be true. This prioritizes "truth understood as disclosure" (Levinas 1996, 99), which means that nothing is true unless it can be made intelligible. Understanding the relationship between the self and the world through reflection means that the world is reduced to what can be represented within consciousness.

Levinas critiques this conception of truth by providing an account of what is unrepresentable to consciousness: the freedom of another person. Levinas argues that the "freedom of the other" (Levinas 1996, 101), will never be "representable to me" (Levinas 1996, 101). Here, Levinas is concerned with maintaining the alterity of the other. If the other is represented within consciousness, they lose their alterity because the other becomes an object that exists within the subject's interior world. For Levinas, this framework can never successfully capture what the other is – that is, a being that is entirely separate from the self. By virtue of being an independent being, the other can never be represented in another's consciousness. The other is separate from the self's consciousness, and they will always escape the self's will. The other therefore has a freedom that cannot be grasped and represented within reflection. The other exceeds the framework of knowing subject

and object of knowledge, because in their independence, the other is necessarily outside of the self's consciousness and cannot be reduced to an intentional object.

Providing an account of truth that exceeds what is representable in consciousness is key for Levinas project of providing an account of the self's responsibility for the other. Throughout his work, Levinas is concerned with the "every day and extra-ordinary event of my responsibility towards other humans" (Levinas 1996, 101). For Levinas, the self is defined by their ethical responsibility for other people. These people exist as separate from the self and their will. The framework of the knowing subject and object of knowledge falls short in capturing this relationship, because consciousness can never accurately capture the other in their alterity. The other does not exist as the other within consciousness, and as such reflection cannot capture the infinite responsibility of the self for the other. If only the representable is true, then there is no way to account for the self's responsibility for the other. For this reason, Levinas' project requires a notion of truth that exceeds the boundaries of the representable.

3. The Concept of Testimony

By critiquing the relationship between the self and the world as that of subject and object, Ricœur and Levinas elevate testimony to a direct source of meaning. Ricœur's discussion centers on religious testimony, and as such he defines testimony as "accounts of an experience with the absolute" (Ricœur 1977, 32). This account can be a direct statement about the divine, or take the form of something that testifies to the divine without directly making claims about it, such as actions done in the name of God (Ricœur 1977, 34). Ricœur argues that if the contents of testimony are an object of knowledge that can be possessed by consciousness, then consciousness "must be the 'subject' and the divine must be the 'predicate'" (Ricœur 1977, 30). If God is an object of knowledge, then the believer as the subject is in the position of imposing their own conception of God onto the divine. Ricœur argues that the subject's self-understanding should instead be shaped by their encounters with the divine. The testimony of others is one form of this

encounter. If testimony is an object of knowledge, then the hermeneutic task when encountering someone's testimony is to impose our own understanding onto it. However, this makes revelation – which Ricœur defines as "the discourse of faith" in which the believer "seems to understand himself through a better understanding of the texts of faith" (Ricœur 1997, 2) – impossible. For revelation through testimony to occur, the self must develop a self-understanding in light of what is testified rather than imposing their own understanding onto testimony.

Ricœur argues that revelation through testimony takes place through a dual process of understanding the contents of testimony and understanding the self in light of testimony. As a form of revelation, the "hermeneutic of testimony consists wholly in the convergence of… the exegesis of self and the exegesis of external signs" (Ricœur 1977, 33). This dual exegesis involves three dialectics. The first is the dialectic between event and meaning. When the event that is testified to occurs, the event and its meaning "immediately coincide" (Ricœur 1977, 33). This is a moment of direct revelation that does not require interpretation, as meaning is given within the event. However, once the moment of encounter passes, meaning is no longer immediately given. For this reason, testimony requires interpretation for meaning to be brought to light (Ricœur 1977, 33). The dialectic of event and meaning thus gives way to the "dialectic of true and false testimony" (Ricœur 1977, 35), where the self must differentiate true and false manifestations of the divine (Ricœur 1977, 33). Through this process of differentiation, the self develops a deeper understanding of the divine by identifying it in cases of true testimony (Ricœur 1977, 35). Finally, testimony is interpreted through the life of the one who testifies. This is the dialectic of "testimony about what is seen and life" (Ricœur 1977, 34). Ricœur argues that "a witness may so implicate himself in his testimony that it becomes the best proof of his convictions" (Ricœur 1977, 34). When the witness is implicated in their testimony, they become fully committed to the truth of what they testify to. The witness' life becomes shaped by something outside themselves, calling their sovereignty into question. Through these movements, the self's own understandings transform. Here, the self is does not

impose their understanding onto God as an object of knowledge, but lets their understanding transform in light of an experience with God. In this way, testimony disrupts an account of the relationship of the self and the world as that of subject and object.

Levinas' account of testimony centers on the relationship between the self and the other, which he argues is a testimony to both an ethical relationship between the self and the other, and a testimony to the absolute. Given that Levinas' project in "Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony" is to provide an account of truth that exists beyond the disclosure of being, Levinas' discussion of testimony is not concerned with the content of what a person says. The self's infinite responsibility to the other cannot "announce itself in testimony as a theme" (Levinas 1996, 105). Instead, this responsibility is testified to simply in the act of communicating (Levinas 1996, 105). Here, Levinas makes a distinction between the "Saying", or the act of communication, and the "Said", or the content of that communication (Levinas 1996, 104). Levinas argues that in approaching the other, no matter what form that approach takes, the self testifies to the infinite responsibility they have for the other: "The Saying… is the approach of the other and already testimony" (Levinas 1996, 104). Testimony thus takes place in the very act of communication.

This is possible because the act of approaching the other is a response to the call of the other. Levinas argues that the other summons the self into a position of ethical responsibility where no other person could take the place of the self (Levinas 1996, 102). It is possible to ignore this summons: Levinas likens the person who ignores their responsibility for the other to Adam hiding away from the voice of God (Levinas 1996, 103). When the self responds to the summons of the other, this action is a testimony to that summons, and thus to the infinite responsibility that the self has for the other. This response manifests through communication, when the self signals their presence to the other. Levinas argues that in speaking to the other, the self is saying "'Here I am.'" Here, the self offers themselves up in service of the other. In doing so, the self

responds the summons of the other and testifies to their responsibility to them.

4. Revisiting the Self and the World

Ricœur's account of testimony points to a self that is completely dependent on the divine. Each movement of Ricœur's hermeneutics of testimony involves a "movement of letting go" (Ricœur 1977, 33) where the self "accepts being led by and ruled by the interpretation of external signs which the absolute gives of itself" (Ricœur 1977, 33). The dialectic of event and meaning exposes the way that the self is "absolutely dependent on certain founding events" (Ricœur 1977, 35). Part of the task of self-understanding is understanding the way that these events have formed our lives. The dialectic of true and false testimony leads to self to follow the "way of eminence" (Ricœur 1977, 35), because through discerning the divine the self also discerns ideas of "justice or goodness" (Ricœur 1977, 35). Finally, the dialectic of life and what is testified points to a complete renunciation of sovereign consciousness. When a person testifies to God through the life they live, they renounce autonomy (Ricœur 1977, 35). This abandonment does not come out of consciousness, but instead is made possible by "confessing its total dependence on historical manifestations of the divine" (Ricœur 1977, 36). Each of these dialectics exposes the self's dependency on things outside itself, resulting in a "letting go" of sovereignty and a recognition of the self's dependence on the exterior world.

Instead of painting a picture of the self's dependence on the exterior world, Levinas' account of testimony characterizes the self's relationship to others as one of complete ethical responsibility. As discussed above, Levinas views the act of communication as testifying to the self's responsibility to the other. This responsibility is what characterizes the self. For Levinas, the other is present within the self as responsibility (Levinas 1996, 102). An encounter with the other takes the form of an "accusation" (Levinas 1996, 102) that summons the self into an ethical relationship. This summons defines the self in its individuality because it is directed to the self and not to anyone else: in the responsibility of the self for the other, "no

one can stand in for me" (Levinas 1996, 102). Summoned by the other into an ethical relationship, the self is characterized by being "for-the-other" (Levinas 1996, 102). Subjectivity does not take the form of understanding the world, but as "tearing-away-from-oneself-for-the-other" (Levinas 1996, 102) and "giving-to-the-other-bread-for-one's-mouth" (Levinas 1996, 102). This points to a giving up of the self in order to live out responsibility for the other. The relationship between the self and the other that is testified to is therefore one of complete obligation for the other.

5. Bridging the Gap Between Ricœur and Levinas Through Gadamer's Concept of Dialogue

Although Ricœur's work on testimony calls the autonomy of the self into question, his account is ultimately still concerned with truth as disclosure. Ricœur's account of testimony focuses on the transmission of knowledge and beliefs from one person to another. Although relationship between the self and the knowledge that testimony discloses is not the relationship between subject and object, the possibility of stepping into this framework is always present because Ricœur treats testimony primarily as a mode through which knowledge is transmitted. This is not a problem for Ricœur, who states that task is not to negate the framework of knowing subject and object of knowledge, but to "undercut [its] primacy" (Ricœur 1977, 29). People do not primarily understand the world by grasping it as an object, but this attitude does sometimes appear "unexpectedly like a 'crisis'" (Ricœur 1977, 29). While the primary mode of encountering the world is not through reflection, the self is still able to step into this mode of apprehending the world. Reflection therefore appears throughout Ricœur's account of testimony. Ricœur is concerned with a dual process of understanding testimony and understanding the self in light of testimony. Developing an understanding of testimony points to a knowing subject who is capable of taking testimony as an object of knowledge. This is especially clear in Ricœur's discussion of the dialectic between true and false testimony. Ricœur argues that the "judicatory dimension of testimony" (Ricœur 1977, 33) takes place on the

"plane of reflection" (Ricœur 1977, 33) – that is, within consciousness that has grasped testimony as an object. Judging the truth value of testimony also involves an imposition of the self's understanding onto the text. Ricœur's account therefore does not go far enough in dismantling the framework of the knowing self and subject of knowledge – this framework is always present in Ricœur's account, even if it is not primary.

While Ricœur does not go far enough in critiquing intentionality, Levinas' preoccupation with providing an account of the unintelligible risks erasing the value of what a person says when they give testimony. Levinas describes a situation of sign-giving that testifies to the infinite, but that does not have any content itself. This is demonstrated by Levinas' priority of the Saying over the Said. While this lends itself to his critique of reflection, Levinas risks giving an account of our relationship to the other that dismisses both what the other has to say and the other's particularity. In his article "Ethics and Community," Hans Herbert Kogler critiques Levinas for creating a universal structure that ignores the historical situatedness of the self and the other. Levinas' other is generalized, and his account of testimony does value what the other has to say. This account is therefore successful in providing an account of what is not representable in consciousness but is unsuccessful in showing that the self has any reason to listen to the other. Levinas fails to articulate "how to address the other's claims" (Kogler 2015, 319). For Kogler, a convincing account of the relationship between the self and the other should both posit the other as independent from the self and as a particular person who has something valuable to share. Levinas' account establishes the other's alterity but not the value of the contents of testimony, and thus erases the ability to respond to the other's claims.

I propose that Gadamer's work on dialogue bridges the gap between Ricœur and Levinas. Ricœur's account of testimony does not go far enough in pushing against the dichotomy of subject and object, while Levinas removes the value of what is said in order to capture what cannot be captured by reflection. Dialogue finds itself between these two accounts. According to Gadamer, dialogue is a process in which

two interlocutors collaborate in order to come to a shared understanding of a subject matter (Vessey 2016, 312). For dialogue to be successful, each interlocutor must approach the other as someone who has something valuable to say. The interlocutors must be open to other's claims, and as such must recognize them as another subject. Dialogue is therefore only possible when the self recognizes the subjectivity of the other, and when the self values the content of what the other has to say (Vessey 2016, 313). While dialogue appears to be structurally distinct from testimony – dialogue implies spoken conversation while testimony is a statement or action – Gadamer argues that interpretation is itself a dialogical process. A person enters into dialogue with whatever they are interpreting by approaching the object of interpretation as something which makes a claim on them (Risser 2016, 125). In this way, when a person interprets testimony, they enter into dialogue with what is testified. Gadamer's conception of dialogue thus preserves the structure of Levinas' testimony, where the self approaches the other as a subject and responds to them, while also echoing Ricœur's emphasis on the self shaping its understanding of the world in light of what is said.

Levinas' concern with approaching the other as a being that is not representable within consciousness has echoes in Gadamer's argument against reflecting out of a relationship with the other. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer warns against encountering another person as an object of knowledge. In this form of encounter, the subject attempts to understand their interlocutor "better than the other understands himself" (Gadamer 2004, 353). This relationship between the self and the other is "not immediate but reflective" (Gadamer 2004, 353). By approaching the other as an object of knowledge, the subject reflects out of their relationship to the other and "robs his claims of their legitimacy" (Gadamer 2004, 354). In attempting to know the other, the self exerts power over the other, robbing the other of their subjectivity by transforming them into an object of knowledge. True dialogue is only possible when the other is seen as another subject who has something true to say. Only in approaching the other as a subject can the self become open to the claim that the other makes on them

(Gadamer 2004, 356). This account of the relationship between the self and the other is deeply compatible with Levinas' work. Like Levinas, Gadamer destabilizes the concept of the other as an object of knowledge, instead prioritizing the claim that the other makes on the self. The structure of Gadamer's dialogue mimics the structure of Levinas' testimony, where a person is called to respond to the summons of the other in conversation.

However, unlike Levinas, Gadamer's dialogue also prioritizes what the other has to say. In dialogue, both interlocutors must be open to the other's claims (Gadamer 2004, 355). In his essay "Language and Alterity," James Risser characterizes this openness as "the 'ethical imperative' to respect the other such that his or her truth claims vis-à-vis a subject matter are taken seriously" (Risser 2016, 316). In dialogue, the self is oriented towards the other in a way that accepts an inherent value to what the other has to say, regardless of the self's own understanding of the subject at hand. Here, the self does not impose their understanding onto the other, but transforms their understanding in light of the other's claims. Accepting the other's truth claims does not reduce dialogue to a purely formal account, as Levinas' account does, but instead establishes the priority of the content of dialogue. One person has to listen to the content of what the other person is saying in order for a common understanding of the subject matter to be reached. At this point, Gadamer's account of dialogue mirrors Ricœur's argument that the hermeneutic task is to understand oneself in light of someone else's testimony. Once the self recognizes the value of what the other person says and takes the content of what is said seriously, the self will acquire a "new self-understanding" (Vessey 2016, 313). This points to a transformative power that dialogue has to shape the self's own understanding.

6. Conclusion

When understood through the framework of a knowing subject and object of knowledge, testimony can only be regarded as something that transmits information. In order to view testimony as a primary source of meaning, the self must be open to the claim that another person's testimony makes on

them. This requires that the self understand the other in their alterity, while also listening to what they have to say. Ricœur and Levinas' accounts of testimony provide two halves of this puzzle: Ricœur describes the hermeneutic process of simultaneously developing an understanding of the self and what is said, while Levinas provides an account of the absolute alterity of the other that cannot be represented in consciousness. By bridging the gap between these two arguments, Gadamer's concept of dialogue effectively elevates testimony to a primary source of meaning.

The topic of testimony provides an entry point into a larger discussion regarding the relationship between the self and the world. Elevating the importance of testimony above simply transmitting knowledge disrupts an account of consciousness that views the exterior world as an object of knowledge. The relationship between people in dialogue and the ways that encounters with others can shape the way the self understands themselves and the world around them are at the heart of the topic of testimony. By taking another person's testimony seriously, the self can step into a deeper engagement with the world that cannot be captured through the framework of subject and object.

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Beyond the Human:
The Pre-Subjective Existence in Bimbenet's Reading of Merleau-Ponty's Anthropology

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Abstract

Étienne Bimbenet's view on anthropology in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy acknowledges the difficulties such a project has due to the openness of the late Merleaupontian notions of expression and existence. In this research, I aim to contribute to this problematization by proposing that the late Merleaupontian phenomenology drafts a pre-subjective existence in his writings on language and perception. I claim that the notion of human in Merleau-Ponty is impossible due to its ontological dependence on subjectivity, which is problematized in his last works. To achieve this objective, my argumentation follows three parts. Firstly, I present Bimbenet's study on anthropology in Merleau-Ponty, in order to raise questions on the exclusiveness of human symbolic behavior. Secondly, I will address Merleau-Ponty's proposal of expression, which I affirm implies an ambiguity between an active and a passive dynamism, to address its existential nature, tearing down an anthropological thesis. And, finally, I will take the previous ambiguity to argue a pre-subjective existence in late Merleau-Ponty, further problematizing the anthropological objective of his first work.

Keywords: human, anthropology, subjectivity, existence, expression, language

In the introduction to *Après Merleau-Ponty* (2011), Étienne Bimbenet cared to highlight the openness that characterizes Merleau-Ponty's work, with the aim to "show that there's a life after Merleau-Ponty"[1] (Bimbenet 2011, 9) since his

philosophy "would appear wide open and available to all further contributions" (11). Sharing this perspective, and in addition to the fact that Merleau-Ponty's last writings are unfinished while drafting a promising ontology of perception, I will try to establish a projection of his late philosophy in order to track there a subtle switch from his early notions and interests on the topic that characterizes Bimbenet's work: anthropology.

Bimbenet's work has highlighted the anthropological dimension of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, centered on a human being that, as he observes, is never thought of as such, but rather criticizing the objective of totalizing the human phenomenon (cf. Bimbenet 2004, 13, 15), and positioning himself against the idealist conception of human as the one with the privilege of spirit or reason (cf. 10). This critique situates Merleau-Ponty as a thinker that doesn't present *humanness* as a defined and recognized essence some beings can participate in and some others don't, but instead as an experience that has blurred lines. This indetermination, not only contributes to a richer proposal of the human but, at the same time, it makes the very notion questionable, since if we are human, we are so in contrast to what? What is 'human' distinguishing itself from? This presentation aims to problematize the presence of an anthropology in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, especially in his later works, to highlight a gesture of going beyond the human experience towards a broader sense of existence. To this end, firstly it will be necessary to acknowledge the main premise of Bimbenet's work, namely, that Merleau-Ponty's notion of experience is always a *human* one. Secondly, I will further develop the vices that an *anthropology* as such in Merleau-Ponty's late work would bring to the cohesion of his thought as a whole, to highlight an ambiguity introduced in the notion of *institution*. Then, finally, I will propose the late Merleaupontian point of view as an existential one, an existence that is not tied to any form of human shape, but rather in a broader sense. This will be done by tracing a path throughout his thought from the ontological notions of 'activity' and 'passivity'.

1. The Human in Merleau-Ponty's Early Phenomenology

In his commentary on the third section 'L'ordre humain' of Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior*, Bimbenet observes that Merleau-Ponty's project in this work is to unite the nature-spirit split, understood as a scenario in which, on the one hand, there's the real empiric nature and, on the other, there's the spirit, the consciousness, what's beyond empiric reality and disposes itself in a sort of ideal world. This split is what brings in the discussion over mechanism and idealism, where mechanism argues that the world is a *partes extra partes* that moves automatically, as an unintended chain reaction; and, on the other side of the debate, idealism proposes that all existent is due to the position of meaning from a consciousness. Merleau-Ponty develops a whole argumentation on what position the human being would fill in this schema, and the goal is to show the inevitable jointure of both these dimensions, particularly in the human experience. Then, the union of nature and spirit is done so by bringing in the idea of a 'spirit of nature' that's co-constituted by the organism that experiences it. This experience of nature is witnessed, in this text, through *behavior*.

The big achievement of this text is to propose a perspective on behavior as an active principle in contrast with the classical mechanistic approach: Merleau-Ponty seeks to overcome the conception of human consciousness as a closed entity and merely synchronized with the movement of its surroundings. That is, reducing behavior to the mere behavioral response to a stimulus, which would assume that, first, the surroundings that produce the stimulus have the element that causes a certain behavior and that, second, the consciousness that perceives the stimulus is limited to passively 'obey' the activity of their surroundings, a foreign activity. Instead, Merleau-Ponty's proposal walks towards the acknowledgment of the activity that's implied in human behavior: "The organism cannot properly be compared to a keyboard on which the external stimuli would play and in which their proper form would be delineated for the simple reason that the organism contributes to the constitution of that form" (Merleau-Ponty

1967, 13). Here, the author recognizes that the organism plays an effective role in the construction of a new form, 'form' being the alternative notion Merleau-Ponty uses throughout the text to refer to 'structure' (cf. Alloa 2017, 20), then, understood as an element of the world with a meaning attached to it, as behavior is, all by an external factor. Bimbenet explains to us that the form is a sense unit, instead of a substantial entity, taking the shape of a meaning to the consciousness, rather than a *fact* that functions in the world (cf. Bimbenet 2000, 31).

Bimbenet observes that behavior understood as what I have proposed here as an active motion from the organism, has an impact on the notion of spirit (mind, consciousness): is not strictly a human transcendental ego, but a broader kind of existence that characterizes itself by its activeness – and, for this reason, Merleau-Ponty speaks throughout most of *The Structure of Behavior* of 'an organism'. Now, what is the distinctive aspect of the human in this active behavior? Bimbenet shows us that the form as a sign of inner action (life) poses at the same time an individualization by demonstrating gradual ways of autonomy with regard to the surroundings (cf. 2000, 32). In this frame, Merleau-Ponty references Hegel's *Jena's Lectures* as follows: "The spirit of nature is a hidden spirit. It does not occur in the form of the spirit itself; it is only spirit for the spirit that knows it." (Hegel *Jenenser Logik* in Bimbenet 2000, 5), to which Bimbenet points out that the author hypothesizes that the human is a part of this natural continuum whose *telos* is the perpetual individualization, of which human*kind* reaches a "third-grade autonomy" (ibid) in the *creation* of a world of meaning outside themselves (cf. Bimbenet 2000, 32).

To account for a life of consciousness, Merleau-Ponty realized the need to also consider the structures of action and behavior in which this life is engaged (cf. Bimbenet 2000, 35). Thus, this idea of individualization comes, paradoxically, from the necessary insertion that every organism has in a certain surrounding: no organism is just an independent *part* of a greater autonomous movement, but is bonded with the medium, bonding that makes possible the behavior as an original movement of *putting in* the world something that wasn't there,

377

a "production of new structures" (Bimbenet 2000, 5). Then behavior marks a distance with the medium that is tributary to its possibility through the emergence of a new element in the state of affairs that wasn't part of the surrounding but not for the intrusion of the organism's behavior. So, similarly, as Hegel puts it, the spirit of nature is only such through the approach to it from the human spirit, the one that can take it as their medium, intertwined with it, and produce a new set of meaningful actions due to the intertwining. It's only this exchange from a constituting consciousness to the surroundings that makes nature such: because it makes sense to *us*. Now, this same scheme can reach further ways of distancing between the organism and the surroundings, contributing to greater levels of individualization, the production of culture the one that characterizes human beings the most. Bimbenet comments on this hypothesis by characterizing human consciousness as one that is not only natural but also naturating (*conscience naturante*) (Bimbenet 2000, 46), which "inscribes us beyond all given nature" (ibid); this would ultimately define the human being as "a new cycle of behavior" (Bimbenet 2000, 32).

To describe the cultural level of individualization, which is called a "second nature" (Merleau-Ponty 1963, 175), Merleau-Ponty points out the particular fixation that infants have with other human's behavior, concerning every other event in nature, through visual perception (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1963, 169). Of course, Merleau-Ponty is not reaching for some kind of essentialism operating in the children's minds when recognizing and fixating more on human gestures. Instead, what could be at stake is the recognition of the familiar. This special fixation is read by Bimbenet as behaviors that have a much better legibility between humans: "The human body has a natural expressiveness that makes him immediately legible by other human bodies: its physiognomy, its gestures, the voice intonation or even the different facial expressions talk about the life of the person that inhabits this body, of their intentions and desires" (Bimbenet 2000, 38). This legibility, which is a categorial attitude (Merleau-Ponty 1963, 64 ff.), works as such only due to certain semantics that are held beforehand, which cannot be incorporated but through the experience of culture –

the experience of a shared medium. So, the argumentation sustains that this legibility exists because there are "known facts" (Bimbenet 2000, 44) in human behavior to other fellow humans, which allows us to develop a constituting consciousness of the surroundings in a different level: the symbolic one. So, humans, not only constitute sense through behavior in relation with objects surrounding us but also produce new meaning through the constitution of symbols that can be exchanged only with other humans. This is later called by Merleau-Ponty the "symbolic behavior" (Merleau-Ponty 1963, 118), which is straightforwardly described as a "superior mode of structuration" (116) and lacking in animals (118). Hence, symbolic behavior is what makes it possible that something that is seen by one individual can be also seen under a plurality of aspects (cf. Bimbenet 2000, 47), thus constituting a true symbol with a shared meaning, one only humans could access.

So, paradoxically, the further individualization of the human being is also what brings up the need and ability for connection and exchange with others: only by being able to identify oneself with regard to the surroundings is that one can *propose* a new meaning to what's appearing as other, an object; and this 'proposal' seems to become even more human as long as one can codify the new symbolic production into a sharable dimension, such as through language. Language appears in Bimbenet commentary on *The Structure of Behavior* not only as a tool to connect with other humans but mostly as "the prolongation of the use-objects and socialization instrument" (Bimbenet 2000, 49) since the symbolic behavior is also inscribed through its projection, namely, in the ability to have a non-actual use (cf. Bimbenet 2000, 48), establishing here a first attempt of virtuality. Hence, connection with other individuals is some sort of consequence of the symbolic behavior whose main aim is to project the self into new structures, further constituting their individuality and, therefore, their distinction and distance from others, may those be the surroundings or the other human beings. Consequently, in *Après Merleau-Ponty* Bimbenet will characterize the properly human (more precisely, "the human world") as "the transformation of life" through culture, which is "a new way of living, new uses of the body,

new perceptive schemas, and not like a separate sphere" (Bimbenet 2011, 64) – while dialoguing with Levi-Strauss on the conception of culture.

2. The Problem of the Anthropological Approach in the Late Merleau-Ponty

If phenomenology seeks an approach to phenomena avoiding any pre-conception that's not founded on experience, then the question that arises from the previous argumentation is: In comparison to what is Merleau-Ponty affirming this human being? Straightforwardly, Merleau-Ponty introduces the categorical attitude while comparing a child's perception and behavior in relation to the surroundings with those of a chimpanzee (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1963, 98 ff.). But such a distinction between the human realm and the animal one is really based on phenomena? Which elements of appearing allow Merleau-Ponty to argue that symbolic behavior is *strictly human*? This assumption is the product of a certain way of understanding symbolism and the cultural dimension, which, as Bimbenet shows in the third chapter of *Nature et humanité*, suffers an important switch when Merleau-Ponty drops the idea of symbolism and instead starts developing the phenomenon of expression in his studies of the word in the Collège de France, from 1952, and *The Prose of the World* (cf. Bimbenet 2004, 205).

Through symbolic behavior, Merleau-Ponty recognizes a whole aesthetical sphere, an ontological level where the previous scheme of objective constitution doesn't work quite as well, since it goes beyond a mere recognition of what there is in the world, by re-signifying it in the fashion of a new structure in the world. This aesthetical level goes hand in hand with a new dimension that Bimbenet points out about phenomenology in the introduction of *Nature et humanité*, namely, that his calling was to "bring the metaphysical mystery of our existence into language, which means at the same time recognizing this mystery as mystery, and at the same time producing a kind of philosophical problematization that can give reason to this mystery" (Bimbenet 2004, 25). Here a contradiction is proposed, so far as, on one side, he tells us that we must *go back* to a mute experience that is beyond language and reason, but at the same

time to rescue any communicable meaning out of this experience. This duality between what cannot be said and what we can *say* about that is what will characterize Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language.

In *Nature et Humanité* Bimbenet acknowledges that from Merleau-Ponty's studies from 1952 on, expression will be understood as a *praxis*, rather than a function, which implies that the phenomenon of expression – and, through it, the whole phenomenon of culture and symbolic behavior – will have its own dynamism, therefore, nor depending anymore on a form of subjectivity or life to be the strict *origin* of it. In the lecture of 1953 to 1954, on the problem of the word, by referring to Paulhan, Merleau-Ponty writes "idea of a language *of the* things *in* the things: the constitutive myth of language as we speak to them" (Merleau-Ponty 2020, 42). The first intuition is to put the figure of the *speaker* aside: language is no longer something we will associate with the subject that 'produces' wording. And this notion is further explored: "My word is 'white' for me, it shows being not in the sense that it is totally understood by me or constituted, but in the sense that we make the body with it [the word], that we are it in the blindness of the act of speaking" (43. My insertion. All underlined by Merleau-Ponty himself). This very vague but eloquent fragment follows an entry on the transparency and opacity of the word in the experience of speaking to another one. Without a proper definition, and in contrast with the ideas of 'transparency' and 'opaqueness', he states that the word appears 'white' to the speaker, to then try to explain it further: what's said shows being, first, not totalized and, second, not *understood*, since we are not anymore in this ontological level, but rather walking towards trying of wording the ineffable. He also affirms that the word shows being in the sense that we "make body with it", which is another way to propose what was before sketched about Paulhan: to have a *praxis* of the word, to inhabit the word. In this moment Merleau-Ponty seeks to critique the idea of 'uttering' the word. Then, he's not talking anymore about a consciousness that *builds* a subproduct of itself that merely signals to a corner of being, but about a body that *becomes* meaning in the very praxis of wording.

Thus, expression is proposed as an autonomous phenomenon, with which also comes its own dynamism. This general conception of language is taken from the Saussurian proposal of meaning in language, which is better exposed in "The Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" (1964). Here Merleau-Ponty points out that the sense of what is said (or, on a broader scale, expressed) doesn't lay in a meaning attached to the sum of the signs, but instead comes up through the sides of each one of them, catching with them everything else surrounding expression (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 39). This is what we will know as the 'diacritical sense' in language. Therefore, sense in expression is not something pre-conceived and brought by the emitter, like a sort of messenger, but instead is built *in* the expression itself, where the subject, the empirical origin of it (the creator, the speaker, the painter, among others) is merely another sign that collaborates in the emergence of the sense.

This experience in literary expression is further developed in *The Prose of the World* in a particular argument that I will expose here in four parts. Firstly, while exemplifying with reading Stendhal, Merleau-Ponty affirms that "once I have read *the* book, it acquires a unique and palpable existence quite apart from the words on the pages" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 11). Here the author diagnoses in the experience of reading something special, namely, that the book seems to obtain a sort of independence concerning what's written, where *'the book'* is no other thing that the general sense that the reading left in the reader. So, Merleau-Ponty is talking about the autonomy of what's expressed. But how is the process of the *split* with the written words and, through it, from the author in the experience of reading? Later, he explores how he, as a reader, approaches more and more what is written, witnessing a sort of intimacy with the text: "I get closer and closer to him [the author], until in the end I read his words with the very same intention that he gave to them" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 12. My insertion). Here's a tricky assumption that's temporary, namely, that we are experiencing the numerically exact meaning Stendhal (in this case) had for his writing. But that's not what's being said: Merleau-Ponty is trying to show us that

we experience it as such. We start a process of intertwining with the text, particularly with the words, since they don't feel like *his* words but, at some point, like *ours*: "common words and familiar events, like jealousy or a duel, which at first immerse us in everyone's world suddenly function as emissaries from Stendhal's world" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 12). Then, to some extent words put the reader and the author together, sharing experiences, and even it feels like becoming one. Immediately, the argument reaches its peak, when Merleau-Ponty describes this bonding as follows: "I create Stendhal, I am Stendhal while reading him" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 12). Before this description, Merleau-Ponty established a methodological distinction, previously introduced in *Phenomenology of Perception*, between *langage parlé* and *langage parlant*[2] (speaking language/word) (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1973, 10), which is retaken after the previous description, in order to define the idea of *parole parlant*: "is the operation through which a certain arrangement of already available signs and significations alters and then transfigures each of them, so that in the end a new signification is secreted" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 13). Then, the experience of *creating Stendhal* or becoming him through reading, to then splitting the sense of 'the book' from the words written by the author is the consequence of a word that isn't a substance but rather a never ceased movement. Hence, it's like the reader 'masters' Stendhal's language, which makes them feel like "we transcend Stendhal. But that will be because he has ceased to speak to us" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 13), and the emitter fades away.

Since this emergence is not dependent on fixed elements, but rather always transforming according to the different signs and elements of the surroundings that will add a new dimension to the expression, Merleau-Ponty is also very clear when stating that the sense is never something totalized and fixed: sense is always emerging and always in a different way. This *continuum* characteristic of sense in expression was firstly exemplified in *Phenomenology of Perception* as the '*langage/ parole parlant*'– differentiated from the 'spoken' one, whose meaning is already determined (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 229) – and then brought back again in *The Prose of the World*, as quoted above, and "The Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence".

With this, expression becomes an autonomous phenomenon, to the point that Merleau-Ponty even writes that "the work deceives by making us believe in an author" (Merleau-Ponty 2013, 112).

Now, considering the indetermination, not only of the sense in expression, but also in its origin, lacking general importance when it comes to what expression implies in terms of meaning, how can we assure that expression and, through it, culture, are exclusively human phenomena? When Merleau-Ponty talks about expression and a speaking or spoken word, he opens these notions to an even broader kind of manifestations, making himself different analysis of painting in various works, making evident that even the distinction *within* the world of expression is impossible – since it would bring in determinations where there's none. Therefore, if the criteria were the usage of *words*, this philosophy of expression tears down any kind of humanism. If it was the possibility of communication, such as the fixation that infants have with other fellow humans, described in *The Structure of Behavior*, this vocabulary that we acquire of human gestures, can also be thought of in communication with animals through another kind of symbolic manifestations – let's think of a puppy wagging their tale when we perceive happiness or playing with other dogs, establishing there a form of communion based on, what we can perceive, as an *own language* among them. Expression is shown to be such a broad and open phenomenon that seems to be recognizable in various kinds of 'living beings' – a taxonomy that's also only valid if we are out of the expressive level.

Bimbenet observes this issue in *Nature et Humanité* when bringing up the difference between constitution and institution, the latter being a concept later developed by Merleau-Ponty in his lecture at the Collège de France in 1954. This development takes shape out of the own critique Merleau-Ponty has towards the primacy of consciousness as the center of perceptive existence (cf. Barbaras 2004, 63), since 'constitution', in its Husserlian heritage, refers to the capacity of consciousness to give unity to the things and, through it, to make them appear with meaning. To constitute depends on the existence of a

transcendental ego, which in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, at this point, is not the key element to the appearing of phenomena, but that of *flesh*. In this context, Merleau-Ponty translates Husserl's *Stiftung* for 'institution', to propose the emergence of *sense* regardless of the dependence on a subjective pole, such as the ego. Institution, then, is the very process of *emergence of sense*, one that is never enclosed or completed, whose openness allows a chain reaction into new events to take place (cf. Merleau-Ponty 2015, 77; Larison 2016, 381).

Bimbenet introduces institution as "when it opens up a new dimension of our experience, the present is neither an absolute creation, nor a mere repetition of the past: it responds to the past, but by 'forgetting' it, i.e. by understanding it in terms of itself and the new dimension it opens up" (Bimbenet 2004, 210). Here he describes a kind of 'becoming' that is not fully rooted in something else that already exists, therefore, having a novelty component, but, at the same time, that is not fully new either, and, as such, remains somehow bonded with a certain *milieu* that is tributary of its appearing. Due to this bond, what emerges in institution 'responds' to the past as a sort of *continuum* to what was before, simultaneously by developing a certain autonomy that allows it to be instituted something new.

Now, what implication does institution have over the anthropological proposal? The notion of institution is key to understanding language as expression, since expression, not only as linguistic but as any symbolic gesture, implies sedimentation, an emergence of sense and, at the same time, through its openness, "a reactivation of the already instituted sense in pursuit of a new institution (Buceta 2019, 56, 57); again, chain reaction. Therefore, first, it implies that institution isn't a structure in which only culture is built, but an entire ontology of becoming: not only what before was understood as a symbolic behavior works actually in the ways of institution but the very *being* becomes such through institution. Therefore, all we perceive and, thus, make sense of, has a meaning to us because of an instituting process: all sense is always subject to new emergences of meaning, or ever transforming itself and never being fully determined. And the very notion of *the human*

385

is no exception. Bimbenet affirms it so: "The man 'institutes himself', which means that there is no 'human condition', but that humanity remains to be made in each singular word" (Bimbenet 2004, 211), and through institution, 'the human' is always open to not be such anymore and to become something else. Humanness at a phenomenal level is never *something as such* but instead could be an experience that emerges due to certain conditions and, as easily as it emerges it will fade away. Bimbenet affirms that "there is simply no human given, but rather a suspension of the human in favor of the expressive movement that presides over its emergence" (Bimbenet 2004, 214), which leads him to propose the idea of a pre-human being built by Merleau-Ponty.

3. The Ambiguity of the Pre-Human

Now, does all of the above mean that the early Merleaupontian philosophy of human and symbolic behavior is wrong or misleading? I propose here that that's not the case, and we can rather observe from *The Structure of Behavior* to his latest works a gradual movement towards the priority of an existence that is neither exclusively human nor strictly subjective – understood as an enclosed totality that distinguishes itself from determined *others*. This path is marked by the element of ambiguity that crosses all Merleaupontian descriptions of the human, which is also highlighted by Bimbenet (2000; 2004).

The first presence of ambiguity is quite evident since the aim of his first work is precisely to conciliate nature and spirit under the figure of the human. A big part of the argument was that through the categorial attitude the human "composes nature and consciousness in an unprecedented way" (Bimbenet 2004, 62), where, on the one hand, there's this organic consciousness that is inevitably bonded with the surroundings as a *natural* fact; but on the other hand, there's also a consciousness that's capable of variate its behavior and propose new things to the natural world. The main issue here is that both 'sides' of the human consciousness are indeed the same, which is clearer in *Phenomenology of Perception*, since "human's inscription in nature is precisely what enables him or her to

escape this belonging" (Bimbenet 2004, 62). Then, humanness so far is a dual reality: a bonded existence that enables it to become beyond the given. Here I propose to read these two 'sides' of human reality as two ontological movements. On the one hand, we have an existence whose actions are somehow coerced by a foreign one, that of natural reality; there's a foreign action being addressed toward human existence, that is directly impacting our own range of actions. In this way, the natural consciousness could be understood as a passive side of human beings, since there's no control over a certain state of affairs. About this bonding, Bimbenet says that the human order seeks to show that "our nature is what engages us in being, not what separates us from it, every one of our acts is, in the most substantial sense of the word, 'motivated': dedicated to the cause of being" (Bimbenet 2004, 115). But the whole point of *The Structure of Behavior* is to show that natural reality isn't reducible to a mere passivity, since on the other hand there's the active side of human existence, which is characterized in this text as what characterizes life at all, which is an action that comes from within – in the human case, produced by the consciousness, the spirit that objectifies the world.

Then, the categorial attitude is defined by this ambiguity, since, as Bimbenet explains it: "that our perception is based on the natural, sedimented knowledge that our body possesses of its world, but that at the same time, this acquired knowledge is constantly measured by the spontaneity of our present consciousness, clearly proves that it is now up to existence" (Bimbenet 2004, 134). This characterization of symbolic behavior resembles importantly to the later understanding of institution since is "based on the possibility of perceiving an unchanging thing from its changing perspectives", where the 'unchanged thing' is the picturing of what would emerge from this power of expression (cf. Bimbenet 2004, 137).

Then, the ambiguity that Bimbenet observes in the categorial attitude can be read under activity and passivity: on one side, an inner movement, the action from within towards the outside; and on the other, a movement that affects existence from the outside, partially determining the first. This duality goes on to reach the proposal of institution and being established

as a topic in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in the lectures at the Collège de France in the years 1954 and 1955. Institution is defined by Merleau-Ponty as "those events (*événements*) in an experience which endow the experience with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense, will form a thinkable sequel or a history" (Merleau-Ponty 2015, 77). However, these events don't occur *ex-nihilo*, but there's always a ground that is holding the emergence, in a *laissez-faire*, in the non-action, in sum, in the passivity of the same existence. The undetermined character of institution lies in the ontological fact that it is not pure action, nor pure doing, but also the permission of intruding. Merleau-Ponty himself describes its action as occurring in a "subterranean logic (*logique souterraine*)" (Merleau-Ponty 2015, 77).

Passivity *in* activity is much better illustrated in cases of artistic expression, which is the approach Stéphanie Ménasé explains in *Passivité et creation* (2003). Passivity in expression is a sort of action from the object that intrudes into an undetermined self: "The object calls to my gaze because it is nameless, without identity. There is 'something' (*quelque chose*). It is not I as consciousness who constitutes 'this', since these 'somethings' are there without me, before any naming" (Ménasé 2003, 80). Expression is inscribed, then, before the constitution of fixed identities, such as 'I' and 'other', indeterminacy that makes expression come from an open space, open to the intrusion of a foreign activity – which, is the only way to constate passivity, without falling back into the mechanism Merleau-Ponty tried to fight against from *The Structure of Behavior* on.

The new ontology that institution brings in for existence modifies how we understand, not only expression, but also, and most importantly to our objectives, the way the expressed is shared and allows us to communicate with others, thus, marking a new path in the world – alluding by this to the first concern on Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior*, to marking *humanness* through the ability to create something open to a plurality of perspectives. About this issue, Bimbenet states:

In this way, meaning is shared and communicated not by standing outside time, but by composing with a temporality of encroachment […]. The eternity of meaning is an 'existential eternity', based on nothing other than the spontaneity of expressive acts; no god, and no humanity by divine right, guarantees in advance the perpetuity of an institution (Bimbenet 2004, 211).

Through this spontaneity, expression not only becomes constant emergence but also becomes autonomous from any sort of emitter. At the same time, this spontaneity is always caught from a background: passivity in expression implies that there's no absolute spontaneity or absolute novelty; we are always bonded with what is characterized as 'the past', and what in *The Structure of Behavior* took the shape of 'nature', in sum, what is not created, what is not new. Bimbenet exemplifies this ambiguity with an analogy to music: "No longer, as *The Structure of Behavior* would have it, a melodic configuration inseparable from the notes it unifies; but more radically a melody improvised to measure, inseparable not so much from the notes as from the chance that constitutes it" (Bimbenet 2004, 255). Here the inseparability from the notes is passivity, which is a kind of ontological coercion, in the sense that is logically impossible for there to be a new melody without the dependence on the notes. What is tying the melody up is the same element that's freeing it. So it is with our existence: what's tying us up in the world is what allows us to exist in a perceptive way at all – which in Merleau-Ponty famously takes the shape of the body.

Through institution, Merleau-Ponty is not *only* telling us that what we express is not pre-determined and always open to re-signification, but also that our very existences aren't pre-determined either, which allows existence to also be open to taking new shapes and meanings. To explain this, in *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty refers to experiences of de-centering of the self: "Through the center of myself I remain absolutely foreign to the being of the things" (1964, 52). Here perception is not what puts us in the center of the experience, therefore working as what also locates us in the world, but as what can also appear as alien, foreign. Thus, being at the center is his way to understand the isolating position of a subjectivity that is unconnected with its surroundings. On the contrary, the

decentering means movement and, through it, relations. There's no center *versus* alienness, but a decentering that is itself alien. Hence, in the same fashion as activity and passivity before, here alienness and the present self are not two opposite and irreconcilable poles, but co-dependent and part of the same existence: then again, ambiguity. This ambiguity is what institutes existence as open and in perpetual movement, which is described by Merleau-Ponty as a "new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up" (1964, 149). This new being is one of porosity, distinguishing it from the fixed and enclosed idea of being, that is traditionally thought of; is the being that allows for institution to take place.

This openness in existence is what makes it difficult to assign a category to it: 'human', 'animal', or even 'subject' or 'object'. What I have here characterized as the 'passive' bonding with the world contributes to an alienation of the self in perception, which is described in various passages of *The Visible and the Invisible*, since passivity is, in a logical simplification, the action of the alien upon us. It puts our existence in a situation of reception, of vulnerability even, which drives to a temporary de-centering of the self (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1964, 193), as Merleau-Ponty describes: "is not entirely my body that perceives: I know only that it can prevent me from perceiving" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 9). Thus, through passivity, the body ceases to be *own body*, but due to the activity in existence, it's not fully *foreign* either. Bimbenet notes this, by stating that: "I inhabit my body, not as 'my body', but as 'a body', visible to any other; I am not 'myself', but 'myself saw from the outside, as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, viewing it from a certain place'" (Bimbenet 2004, 270), therefore, I exist delivered, at the same that instituting.

4. Conclusions

One of the ideas I've established in this study is that of a continuous unity throughout Merleau-Ponty's work, which suffers from a subtle breaking point in his lectures at the Collège de France. This takes place as an interval from his

further exploring of the phenomenon of expression, once opened with the categorial attitude in the attempt to define the human in *The Structure of Behavior*, until his divorce from the embodied consciousness in the coining of institution over constitution. One of the many elements that work across his philosophy, and the main one explored here is the idea of an ambiguity in existence. The ambiguity that characterizes human existence from the early texts shows us that part of existing and expressing means to be partially delivered to what's not *own*, to what's not an *I*. Part of being in the world is to *not being totalized*, not only as a human – we can never fully constitute ourselves as humans – but we can't even fully constitute ourselves as subjects, as existences that differ radically from a suppose objective world.

So, how to speak about an anthropology in Merleau-Ponty? Is still possible? For sure, there's no such thing as 'the human' from Merleaupontian phenomenology as such. In this research, I tried not just to show how complex it is to affirm that there *is* (still) an anthropology in Merleau-Ponty (since there *was* one in his first work), but also to point out that what thematically supported any formulation of an anthropological approach was the conception of subjectivity. As it was argued, the idea of the human rests overall in the possibility of a 'further' individualization, regarding the world. Thus, with the rising of passivity in Merleaupontian ontology, understood as an engagement and intromission of the world in expression and existential activity, we are witnessing two things. Firstly, that expression implies no individualization at all, but, on the contrary, is the event of an inevitable intertwining with the world, and therefore, *humanness* cannot rest on expression or on the cultural dimension of existence. And, secondly, the very process of 'further' individualization is destined to fail as proposed in *The Structure of Behavior*, since it is not a project that is achieved at a certain point in time, but an oscillating way to inhabit the world, based upon the ontology of indeterminacy and shared existence.

Finally, it's important to also acknowledge that, regardless of the above, Merleau-Ponty's whole philosophy is all the time driving us back to human experiences: this is due to what Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes as a fundamental narcissism (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1964, 139): his ontology centers

on the possibility of the Being, what there is, and our only access to the Being is through our position in the world, which is inevitably historically human. Nevertheless, this *humanness* of our perspective is nothing determined nor differentiated from other experiences, since he also highlights the importance of the openness of the Being and the danger of unfounded determinations, as Bimbenet introduces in *Après Merleau-Ponty*: Merleaupontian conceptual creations such as flesh or expression "they appear to be wide open, and available for further input" (Bimbenet 2011, 11).

NOTES

[1] All references to publications in non-English languages are my translation.
[2] Also named in other texts, such as *Phenomenology of Perception* as *parole parlée* and *parole parlant*. Here both will be used in an exchangeable way.

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A Dignified Life: A Philosophy of Attention for Authentic Performance

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Abstract

This study presents a philosophy of attention that promotes authentic performance. As described here, attention is about training outgoing and ingoing attention skills, which can ultimately connect an individual to others and the world. This ability can help the individual remain focused and receptive to what happens while at the same time accepting their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The ability to pay attention is crucial to performing and living authentically, regardless of the person's area of expertise. The philosophy of attention presented here is rooted in existential philosophy, flow psychology, mindfulness, and acceptance-based psychology. It aims to help individuals and organizations examine what they can do and how they can actualize their potential more freely and with greater clarity. This results in better performance and increased existential meaningfulness and joy, leading to a more dignified life.

Keywords: Performance, Authentic, Attention, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, flow

Introduction

It is often said that success in sports is not only about physical strength and bodily elasticity but also about the athlete's state of mind—'sport is a mind game.' It is about being in the zone or flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Mumford, 2015).

In this article, I will show that this not only applies to athletes, but the mental part is crucial for everyone who wants to perform at a high level. However, the aim of this article is not solely related to performance but to what can be referred as authentic performance, which leads to existential well-being

and meaning. For an individual to perform authentically and with high intensity, regardless of the nature of the work, two elements are essential: first, attention is essential for our presence and ability to concentrate and get into the experience of being in the zone or flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Second, freedom presupposes the ability to pay attention. Freedom, as used here, does not refer to nudging, where an individual is encouraged to behave in a certain way (e.g., financial incentives), while they are also given the freedom to choose differently (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Nudging limits the freedom to choose between already given alternatives. By contrast, freedom, as used here, refers to becoming without a specific end goal (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000). This understanding of freedom correlates with what in mindfulness is called open awareness meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) and emphasizes a shift from a spotlight consciousness—a focused mode of attention, toward a lantern consciousness—an open mode of attention (Gopnik, 2010).

Furthermore, when discussing performance, it is natural to think of competition and the vertical winner–loser mentality that characterizes many aspects of today's society. Competition is more than that. The philosopher Drew Hyland (1978) describes in the essay "Competition and Friendship" that competitio initially comes from the Latin word *competitio*, which means to question or strive together. In alignment, performing is not always about winning but an opportunity to gain self-knowledge, whereby one gradually lives more authentically, expresses oneself better, and contributes to the community. The research in this article aligns well with what author and mythologist Joseph Campbell wrote: "When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness" (1998,126). Authentic performances bring the individual in touch with life and others.

In this article, I argue for the importance of freedom in our performance and achievements, that is, for living a life worth living. This will be done with the help of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow Psychology, Mindfulness and Acceptance-based Psychology*, especially "Acceptance and

Commitment Therapy" (ACT), and more traditional Western philosophies of attention. More specifically, I will show how they can help to:

1. strengthen our attention toward what is happening;
2. accommodate or accept what happened and happens;
3. become aware of our self-creation and make the right and authentic choices; and
4. free ourselves from what keeps us existentially imprisoned.

All of these have an impact on our performance.

1. Method

A phenomenological inquiry is typically described as turning back to the '*Sachen selbst,*' that is, meeting and describing the world without any filter (Heidegger, 1993). Etymologically, phenomenology refers to both something appearing (*phainestai*) and bringing it to light (*phaino*); thus, phenomenology is the method about *that* which appear (Heidegger, 1993). Alternatively, Manen defines phenomenology as "Turning to experience as lived through" (Manen, 2017, xx). Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline and a specific practice used in qualitative research in anthropology, psychology, and psychotherapy. This is a receptive and sensitive way of meeting the world (McLeod, 2022). The guiding approach begins with the assumption that the researcher (or therapist) "knows nothing about the client's experience" (Erskine et al., 1999, 19). Asking questions from a position of "not knowing" is a humble approach where the researcher accepts his or their ignorance (Firestein, 2012). Common questions include the following: What is this experience? How did the meaning of this experience arise? How do we live with these experiences? How does the lived experience present itself to the researcher and the participants? (Manen, 2014; Finlay, 2012).

The participants in this study consisted of three different groups: a group of ten middle and top managers from Denmark (six women and four men), 40 pharmaceutical sellers from Spain (21 men, 19 women), and 15 school teachers and directors from Spain (13 women, 2 men). The format for two

groups was workshops of three complete days, while one group (the schoolteachers) participated in an eight-week training session of two weekly hours. The procedure consisted of presenting the participants to the theory (see the next chapter), during which I mixed traditional mindfulness exercises with individual and group reflections on the problems that they had experienced or emerged during the sessions. Next to teaching and facilitating me, I observed and took notes. I did not intervene based on these suggestions. Subsequently, I conducted simple semi-structured interviews focusing on their "lived experience" referring to the workshop and what emerged. Thus, the lived experience, more specifically, refers to whatever the workshop activated from the past or during the session, stressing the importance of allowing participants to decide what was worth dwelling on further. The process was as follows: 1) turning towards the lived experience, 2) allowing participants to wonder and dwell on what happens, 3) locating or formulating key questions or problems, 4) reflecting alone and/or in groups, and 5) deciding how to move on.

For example, turning to a lived experience could refer to having experienced frustration in a particular work situation and what it was like, especially what it *felt* like. Thus, a wonder about this experience opens or deepens its meaning or significance. What might it mean? According to Heidegger (1993), wonder is an essential part of phenomenological inquiry, asking questions about the obvious or what one takes for granted. The process of wondering strengthens the main problem or question that the participant, alone or together, can reflect. Experience (or data) is not analyzed according to any ideal or set of norms; instead, it is an immanent analysis based solely on what happens and what possibilities it opens (Deleuze, 2002). In that sense, I link phenomenological inquiry with an immanent ethical practice, where the question is not what the individual should or ought to do but what might also be possible. This method correlates with the general theoretical approach and idea of attention training in workshops.

The idea of linking attention, authenticity, and flow comes from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In *The Logic of Sense* he writes, "Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us" (2004, 169). The idea was that a dignified life equals a life worth living. This is my first thesis. The central questions are as follows: How can we bear in mind what occurs? How can the participants *will* and release what happens to them? Ethics in this context are not about judging but about affective or emotional relations between a collective of minds and bodies, for example, at a workplace. These interconnections can be combined to enhance the ability to perform or inhibit joint agency. It is not relevant whether what happens is in line with individual goals but how an individual can open, perhaps transform, in meetings with collective forces. There is something dignified when trying to match what is happening without judgment. A dignified or worthy life is, therefore, not passive acceptance but emphasizes the active aspect of how a person can come into harmony with life, connect with the world, and grow in new directions. Psychologist Rollo May wrote in *The Courage to Create*:

> Human freedom involves our capacity to pause between the stimulus and response and, in this pause, to choose the one response toward which we wish to throw our weight. The capacity to create ourselves, based on this freedom, is inseparable from consciousness or self-awareness (1994, 100).

Awareness is knowing. For example, becoming aware of thought instead of being lost in one's thoughts; when this happens, a liberating opening occurs in the mind, where a person can focus on what is lighter, freer, and not burdened by objectives. Create new values full of zest for life. "Freedom means letting go of suffering," writes meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein in *Insight Meditation* (2003, 5).

It is my conviction that a dignified life revolves around becoming free. Freedom is a central concept. This is my second thesis. As Simone de Beauvoir writes, "[f]reedom is the source from which all meanings and values spring" (2015, 23). The

overall thesis is that free people perform better than unfree people; they create value because they live with dignity.

2. A Theoretical Sketch

There are several ways to understand the relationship between attention and performance. For example, in an attention economy, attention is considered a limited resource that should be allocated in the best possible way to maximize profit. Attention has become an instrument for this purpose. In the following, attention is not a resource or an instrument but is linked to experience, understood as an investigative and experimental way of living, where the side effect is increased joy in life and more authentic achievements.[1]

2.1. Flow

In *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness* (2002), psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a committed action in which we are fully present. The best moments are not passive or receptive and write Csikszentmihalyi but occur when our body and mind work at the limits of their performance. "Optimal experience is something that we make happen" (2002, 3). In the article "Play and intrinsic rewards," Csikszentmihalyi defines flow as "a state in which action follows action according to an internal logic … we experience is as a unified flowing from one moment to the next … in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present and future" (1975, 42). Later, in an interview, he defined flow as "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). According to the psychologist, there is a formula for this optimal state: "Flow occurs when both challenges and skills are high and equal to each other. Good flow activity is one offers challenges at several levels of complexity" (1996).

Multiple levels of complexity refer to challenges that can arise owing to changing situations, which become an incentive to explore, test, and develop one's skills. This flow opens the process of self-discovery. No one knows what they are capable of, both physically and mentally, until they try. Flow is an invitation to live on the edge of one's performance within the field where one is currently performing with joy. For the same reason, flow is not a passive experience but a recognition of being part of something, constantly becoming. The individual constantly affirms that, which increases his/her ability to perform, sets the forces of life free. Liberation is connected to the fact that in the flow experience, an individual is not burdened with how he or it must approach the challenges; rather, the learning process is an integral part of the practice.

The end goal is not what primarily matters; instead, it is the immediate feedback associated with doing something valuable such as playing a game.[2] Csikszentmihalyi also mentions chess players, tennis players, and mountain climbers. The latter knows that an incorrect decision is equivalent to a fall. The act itself matters more than obtaining a reward or avoiding punishment. Individuals are free to actualize their unknown potential. An unimagined potential does not mean that we can become whatever we want; rather, we still do not know what can be achieved. No one enters the flow because they want to but solely by devoting themselves to their current activity. "What you look for too determinedly, you do not find. However, he who in his thinking life has first given free rein to their spontaneous source will lack neither ideas nor values," writes Merleau-Ponty (1999, 111).

Flow is stretched between the past and future, where life is never completely edited or created. Similarly, human existence is not provided once or for all. This is constantly becoming the case. However, if the spontaneous movements of life are controlled or pressed into too rigid forms of thought, feeling and behavior—regardless the well-intentioned intentions—the scope for action is minimized. When freedom is minimized, the level of performance decreases, along with the possible meaningfulness and joy of being alive. In the absence

of freedom, no flow was observed. This does not imply that the flow is purely chaotic. By contrast, flow is associated with increased awareness, which depends on the ability to pay attention. Several techniques and approaches can help promote a more mindful lifestyle.

2.2. Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Psychologies

Mindfulness- and acceptance-based psychologies belong to the third wave of behavioral therapies (Hayes et al, 2006).

The first refers to traditional behavioral therapy that focuses exclusively on shaping behavior (e.g., Skinner). In the second wave, we found that unlike the first wave, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) focused on thoughts, feelings, and choices. Here, the therapist helps the client change dysfunctional thought patterns and emotional behaviors. A classic book by the positive psychologist Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (2006), is an example. Here, he shows how pessimists can learn to become more optimistic using a set of cognitive skills, for example, through the psychologist Ellis's ABCDE model. Adversity sets in motion beliefs that can have negative consequences due to the client's pessimistic outlook; for this reason, the client is encouraged to dispute his or her beliefs until he or she feels existentially *uplifted (energization)*. In the third wave of behavioral therapy, mindfulness and ACT were observed. ACT psychologists Hayes and Strosahl (2004) argue in *Practical Guide to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* is contrary to CBT – that trying to control and change thoughts and feelings is not worthwhile. In contrast, an attempt to change them is a part of the problem. For the same reason, mindfulness and ACT therapists attempt to help clients accept their inner experiences. As with flow, this is not an act of will. Individuals can accept only what they can make room for.

Mindfulness can help individuals to become aware of what is important and existentially rewarding. Mindfulness is characterized by mental clarity that arises from being mindfully aware of the present moment in a kind and nonjudgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Within ACT, clients are similarly helped to increase their psychological flexibility,

which is described as "the ability to contact the present more fully as a conscious person and to change or maintain behavior when it serves valuable purposes" (Hayes et al., 2006, 7).[3] For example, can mindfulness practice help individuals witness what they feel, think, or experience. Based on this, a person can give up what he or it holds for selfish reasons (e.g., a special identity or narcissistic self-image) and make room for something bigger.

What occurs refers to both the inevitable suffering of life, such as interpersonal breaks, dismissals, illness, and death, and the suffering that arises because we cannot accept the initial inevitable suffering. The formula is as follows: unavoidable suffering + denial = avoidable suffering. Denial can be replaced by the acceptance of self-care and compassion.[4] Within ACT, the focus is more on intentions and values than on objectives and goals. Values are often regarded as immutable principles that are subsequently evaluated, even though they presuppose evaluations. More operationally, values differ from goals in that goals are limited; they end, and the person moves on to the next thing. These values are infinite. They are ways of being that can never be redeemed, but can guide action from one moment to the next. Some ways of being are judgmental, whereas others are positive and inclusive.

Flow is valuable because of its inherent freedom; however, there is no guarantee that people in flow are compassionate and generous. Csikszentmihalyi states

> [i]ndividuals who depart from the norms—heroes, saints, sages, artists, and poets, as well as madmen and criminals—look for different things in life than most others do. The existence of people like these shows that consciousness can be ordered in terms of different goals and intentions. Each of us has this freedom to control our subjective reality (2002, 28).

Consciousness is also linked to freedom. It arises in an encounter with or about something that an individual can take in and function with, whereby the person experiences joy and strength. Alternatively, a person may become drained, frustrated, and sad because something threatens his or their becoming.

Psychological flexibility can help individuals cope more, but also clarify one's limits in terms of what that person can tolerate. When exploring one's limits, it is important not to judge oneself or the circumstances but instead to attentively, curiously, creatively, and compassionately explore the possibilities of new authentic achievements. The authentic does not refer to a particular ideal of existence, but rather to an experimental way of life, where a person continuously gets to know him or herself better to become the person that he or she can become.

2.3. Attention Philosophy

Although many today associate mindfulness with Eastern philosophy, the concept has a long history in Western philosophy. Aristotle writes, for example, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*,

> A man who sees is aware that he is seeing, a man who hears that he is hearing and a man who walks that he is walking; and similarly, in all our other activities there is something that is aware of them, so that if we perceive, we perceive that we are perceiving, and if we think, that we are thinking. To be conscious that we are perceiving or thinking is to be conscious of our existence … To be conscious that one is alive is something pleasant (2004, 228).

Aristotle's awareness is a sensitive form of bodily experience or bodily consciousness, in which attention is directed outwardly and inwardly. This means that what matters is not what a person wants, but what a person can do. No matter how much a person wants something, they can only do what they can currently do and what they are currently capable of. However, what a person can do now is something impermanent in that the human being is in a constant process of becoming (Dweck, 2019).

The Irish philosopher Iris Murdoch (2001) says in *The Sovereignty of Good* that introspective self-reflection is a false picture of a good life. She believed that we could easily preserve some conceptual structures that had previously made the concept of God comprehensible. For example, replacing God's religious idea with the concept of the good. Contrary to Plato's transcendent world of ideas, which refers to an idealized,

abstract, and normative world, Murdoch believes that the good reveals itself to us in our daily encounters. This occurs when we experience a loving gesture or action and various forms of kindness and helpfulness. Or the opposite. Murdoch shows admirable faith in the human ability to assess whether a concrete event is good or less good. "Attention is rewarded with an acknowledgment of reality" she writes (2001, 87). The Irish thinker also pointed out that if we live attentively, we will be able to see who needs extra care, a hug, a reprimand, and so on. Instead of striving to live up to ideals, we become aware of loving and joyful encounters when they occur.

Attention is the receptivity that gradually enables the individual to bear more and become worthy of bearing the event that occurs or happens to us. Murdoch (2001) describes this practice using the term unselfing, which opens our body and mind to others and the world. To transcend oneself and expand one's limitations – becoming freer. Through this attention, we can gain a sense of how selflessness and freedom are connected.

Let us summarize some similarities between flow, mindfulness, ACT, and Murdoch's philosophy of attention.

First, it is an outgoing or outwardly turned practice that differs from much of the contemporary tendency to focus exclusively on oneself (Janning, 2015). The purpose of turning attention outward is that the individual experiences things with all his or their senses as they truly are and not through a narrow egoistic lens that only cares about personal goals, pursuit of status, and possible prestige. "The ego falls away," says Csikszentmihalyi (1996, xx). Murdoch writes we must let go of "the big fat relentless ego" (2001, 51). This ego hinders achievements. For example, due to selfish concerns, an individual submits goals that are not rewarding to him or them. No one gets into flow because of stimulating dreams and beautiful wishes, but only by engaging attentively in what the person is doing here and now. Another important point is that because we live largely inattentively, many people overlook the experiences they have already experienced. We have all experienced moments of joy, self-forgetfulness, and contemplation where time flies, a feeling of "mastering our destiny" writes Csikszentmihalyi (2002, 3).

Attention training is an invitation to turn our attention outwardtoward life and our engagement with the world, and then inwardtoward the thoughts, feelings, and inner experiences that pass through. The more attentively we live, the clearer it becomes for all people to connect. Individual performance has become a collective effort towards improvement. How can these thoughts and ideas be compressed so that they do not remain concepts or theories, but rather concrete bodily experiences of freedom, presence, and commitment?

3. Attention Training and Reflections

The following examples is based on my interview and observation of the participants. In various workshops, I have worked with four dimensions:

1) *Attention*—a both outward-turned and inward-turned practice that emphasizes a nonjudgmental and present presence, as well as a contemplative immersion.

2) *Problematizing* – which is Accepting, unfolding, perspective, nuance, questioning, doubting, and investigating.

3) *Make the decision worth repeating* – which depends on what I do, that is, how I live with the experiences I have made and the problems I have encountered, how I move forward—what do I reach forward to my own and the general future existence of the coming human beings?

4) *Freedom*— The temporary result of the decision, which is transformative in that it lets go of the destructive and makes room for the growth of existential rewards.

This is not a slavish linear practice but rather a set of dimensions that affect each other. The first three interact crosswise, whereas the freedom is an ongoing evaluation. However, most problems arise owing to inattention. Something crucial is being overlooked.

For example, many are busy comparing themselves to teammates, colleagues, or competitors instead of focusing on their own events. What happens to them? Similarly, many participants were distracted. It could be argued that they had interacted with their partner earlier, which blurred their

ability to concentrate during the day. Alternatively, geopolitical incidents can occur elsewhere. In both situations, the participants were mentally different from their bodies. Problems can be concrete incidents that contradict expectations and hopes. An employee who is overlooked in a project or receives less encouragement (e.g., recognition); an employee who receives a lower bonus. The result is often frustration, anger, and bitterness, which makes people forget the space of possibilities between stimuli and response, where they are free to focus on what is important. Training attention can reveal the deeper-seated enjoyment and envy that exist not only among competitors but also between colleagues and teammates. Ignorance, desire for something else, or aversion to what appears or comes to light (Heidegger, 1993). Some problems become more evident when a person imagines that he or she has found the "solution" to a problem, but on reflection, realizes that the decision is not worth repeating because it was not liberatingor it harmed others, leaving the person with a new problem. Attention is essential, as it brings people into direct contact or touch with the world, whereby they can more easily overcome their own ego. Like all other types of abilities and capacities, the ability to pay attention must be maintained. This can be done with the help of meditation, but also with daily effort; for example, when a person talks to another person, they give each other their full attention. Can you stay focused and present when talking to your daughter, partner, or college member?

Attention enables individuals to register what is occurring. In addition, it makes people aware of what they may not be able to accommodate. However, they could not maintain their concentrations. It is here that problematization can have a clarifying effect in such situations. Why do I not accept what is happening? What does this get to do with me? Is it my ego getting in the way? Or, more concretely, how do I relate to a family member or colleague that I do not like? How do I respond to an attack on my vanity, professionalism, gender or sexuality? How do you fall into and out of job satisfaction or love? How can I improve my daily life? How do I know that the right thing is correct?

The ability to look inwards must be balanced with the ability to look outward. Be clear of the experiences that a person has for him or itself from one moment to another. Attention is also about having sufficient self-awareness to know that one's ego is nothing more than an empty form shaped by his one's receptivity and contact with the world. This opens up a more compassionate approach for oneself and others.

The problematization phase is not about finding a solution as if it already existed on a shelf-down in the basement. A rigid problem-solving approach quickly reduces or "treats life as a problem to be solved rather than a process to be lived" (Hayes, 2019, 10). Instead, the challenge will be to create new ways of performing, working, and living to overcome the problem. Alternatively, they simply try new forms of life. Problems can arise due to a lack of imagination, conceptual errors, ideological obsessions, false assumptions, or a lack of distinction between prescriptive and descriptive languages. Alternatively, perhaps the problem is his, her, or theirs, as the person is unable to relate to what is said to them, after which they want to wipe it out on others, making it their fault that they allowed themselves to be influenced—that is, they are not aware of alternative paths ahead. It often helps clarify the problems faced by a person. The challenge is to accept or view the problem as an independent phenomenon that exists, regardless of the individual. Therefore, the person is not a problem although it does affect them.

A few examples: A female HR manager felt offended when one of her male colleagues complimented her appearance. "You look good." Without condemning the man or herself, she became aware that the problem was not as much in his words as her fear of not being taken seriously. When she thoroughly reviewed her experience with the man, she realized that he had never doubted her professional abilities or leadership. On the contrary. She also recognized that men were generally friendly and complimentary toward all her colleagues, both male and female. There was nothing sexual in the courtesies. She discovered that the problem was connected to the special perspective through which she interpreted the man's words. Gradually, she recognized that her sense of inadequacy was

rooted in the lack of a more pluralistic perspective and psychological flexibility that could help her accept and see value in momentary doubt and uncertainty, without blaming others. Acknowledging this, she felt empowered and encouraged to live a more committed life, in accordance with her values.

Another example concerns a lack of recognition and feelings of injustice, as an employee did not receive what he or it thought they deserved. This feeling triggered anger, frustration, and resignation. Several participants (from all three groups) recognized that part of the problem was connected to the persons' expectations, beliefs, and even fantasies about the future that they themselves had created. The lack of recognition hit in a double way because the person acknowledged that they had not been true to themselves but compromised to please a leader or a particular ideal or goal. The importance of allowing value to guide people's lives has become imminent.

The third example concerns a group of salespeople who suffer from stress and have lost their job satisfaction. The problem was that they no longer managed to be presently aware because their thoughts jumped from a depressed mood about the unfulfilled goals of the past to a fear of the insurmountable goals of the future. I asked them why they were salespeople, and gradually we got closer to the rewarding challenges and intrinsic pleasure they associated with their work. We focused on the present moment and its values while disregarding the goals. Thus, by focusing on doing what is important here and now, they gradually rediscovered the joy of workand, interestingly, from the company's point of view, their sales improved.

The fourth example concerns a group of teachers who became aware of how they unintentionally confused their teenage students by saying, "You must follow your heart" (humanistic psychology), "You should avoid certain thoughts" (cognitive therapy) and "Remember to behave properly" (behavioral psychology). The heightened awareness helped the educators expand their own psychological flexibility and notice how their well-intentioned advice to students pointed in conflicting and confusing directions.

Thus, what is a better way forward?

The third element—the decision—is, in short, about following Nietzsche's idea of eternal repetition. What he suggests is that the question in everything that we do is "[d]o you desire this once more and innumerable times? Would you lie upon your actions as the greatest weight" (1974, 273). Thus, imagine repeatedly living the life you are living right now. This eternal repetition of the drumbeat of life. This idea might seem confusing and boring for many, but why exactly? What does it say about our lives, our working lives if we do not want to repeat most of the things that we do? For Nietzsche, eternal return opens the possibility that what you repeat is something enriched and joyful. What is pleasurable, of course, depends on how you want to live your life, what you can do, and the changing context. However, each moment the person is confronted with the following question: Would you repeat this?

The fourth dimension was type of validation. Decisions that someone does not want to repeat, free, no one. They inhibit and rain people. Some of the reflective questions were as follows: Did your decision make you freer? Did it improve your existence? Were you strengthened existentially? Do you perform better? Do you feel increased zest for life and empowerment?

Becoming dignified or worthy of what happens, therefore, is not about life having to be lived in a certain way but relating to what happened in a certain way, namely, a way that is meaningful and joyous. It is of no use, as Murdoch writes, to tell a person that they should stop loving their old lover. "What is needed is reorientation," she writes—a different way of living or being in the world—"that will provide a different kind of energy." She continues, "to stop loving is not an act of will, but to become aware of something else" (1999, 345).

Attention helps people to become aware of something else. Perhaps another way of responding to what happens is possible and worth trying.

Conclusion

Most of us have experienced something that we find difficult to bear. When a person cannot accept what is

happening, their performance becomes less free and excellent, and they or acts with reduced spontaneity and authenticity. Unfortunately, many try to avoid what they fail to make room for, that is, accepting life difficulties, and fail to affirm what might be worth repeating. The latter part, which might be worth repeating, requires that the person attentively experiences life.

With attention training, people can learn to accept what happens as it occurs, including their own inappropriate behaviors or mistakes. Thus, they create a space for opportunity in which joy can arise. Experiencing these moments of joy can help a person gain courage to act by following what is liberating – what is significant – to his or their values.

A worthy or dignified person does not create a mode of existence in which he or it lives. They live in such a way that they create space.

NOTES

[1] The American psychologist William James (1890, 402) writes that attention is not a passive experience but the opposite: "My experience is what I agree to participate in."

[2] I deliberately read Csikszentmihalyi in alignment with my research focusing more on valued living, not solely goals, which opens for more authentic performance.

[3] ACT focuses on six processes to establish psychological flexibility: Cognitive defusion, Acceptance, Committed action, Values, Present moment and Self-as-context. I will not go into more detail about these, but depending on the difficulties that a client may have in terms of accepting one's own thoughts, feelings, actions or what happens, certain processes can be more liberating to work with than others.

[4] Mindfulness (wisdom) and compassion are the two wings of Buddhism. You can be mindful without being compassionate, but not the other way around. Compassion is an important component of acceptance (see Janning, 2018).

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The Epidemic, the Sovereign, and the Age of (Mis)Information: Giorgio Agamben vs. Jean-Luc Nancy[1]

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Abstract

This essay discusses the recent works of Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben on the coronavirus. Quite some continental thinkers, such as Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek, offered their take on the epidemic already, yet those of Nancy and Agamben gained the most traction in the field. In the first section we elaborate Agamben's somewhat formidable interpretation of "the invention" of the epidemic: Agamben apparently believed the epidemic to be one more biopolitical device deployed by governments to suit the masses. In the second section we present Nancy's account of the philosophical consequences of the epidemic. Nancy's work is, in large part, an oblique response to Agamben's position, insisting that science and medicine would be the least bad mode of procedure available to halt the epidemic. It is, furthermore, not a question of the free, unlimited ego against biopolitical systems but rather of recognizing our frailty since all egos, well before saying 'I', are bound to each other from the very outset. The third section considers the most important critiques of Agamben's work, which has caused quite the debate, in the secondary literature. The thesis of this article is that these, somehow, affirm the correctness of Nancy's account of the epidemic on a number of themes, such as the fate of the sovereign, and sovereignty in an age of (mis)information: even the sovereign is not absolute. Yet, even if true, I will wonder: if there is too much critique of our democratic institutions in Agamben, is there enough critique of democracy in Nancy's work? Are we satisfied with a spirituality alone?

Keywords: Coronavirus, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, sovereignty, information

Many of the major figures of today's continental philosophy have responded to the outbreak of the coronavirus. In 2020 and 2021 books of Slavoj Žižek, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, Peter Sloterdijk and Bruno Latour on this topic saw the light of day. Though all of them use a certain aplomb—all of them find, in one way or another, that our global society needs to rethink all of its institutions and ways of being—it is safe to say that the works of Agamben and Nancy attracted the most attention in the current academic world.

1. Giorgio Agamben: Where Did we Land?

Quickly after the outbreak of the virus, Agamben posted brief contemplations on his blog. It is safe to say that these caused quite the stir.[2] These blogs, and later the book, continue to baffle their readers. Everything that unsettles the intellectual community since is present: one finds, for instance, that the virus is somewhat like an "ordinary flu"; at other times, Agamben is close to the most mediocre of conspiracy theories, attacks all forms of online education, and so on. This essay seeks first to present a nuanced, contextualized account of Agamben's position. It then portrays some of the major critiques of this position in the literature which all seems to focus on his mistaken account of sovereignty in an age of (mis)information. This will allow us to consider Nancy's work, not only as a response but also as a considerable correction to Agamben's thesis: what we see happening today is not an absolute sovereign (even in the guise of an authoritarian state) informing, instructing or misinforming its citizens, but a sense of fleeting sovereignty, of a passing of power into multiple singular and plural entities. In this way, one might argue that the vacating of the place of power, analyzed by Carl Schmitt, from the sovereign to the 'empty place' of power in democracy, is now extended into a fluid ontology of, ultimately, (our) passing within in the world.

Agamben's consistence in his blogs is, however, noteworthy. He does not, for that matter, apologize in later blogs for a former faulty interpretation. Agamben, moreover, regularly comments upon events happening in society. In his

Homo Sacer-series one finds elaborated interpretations of Guantánamo Bay and the events of 9/11. Provocation is not absent from Agamben's work either. Well-known is his phrase that Auschwitz is the hidden law of modernity.

Yet, let's not turn Agamben into the Bolsonaro of contemporary philosophy too quickly. On March 20, 2020, in response to the question what it means to live in a state of emergency, he writes:

> Surely, staying at home. [But also] remembering that our neighbor is not just […] a possible agent of contagion, but first of all our fellow to whom we owe our love and support […] It surely means staying at home, but also […] asking ourselves whether the militarized emergency that has been declared in this country is not , among other things, a way of burdening citizens with the very serious responsibility that governments bear for having dismantled our healthcare system. It surely means staying at home, but also making one's voice heard and urging that public hospitals be restituted the resources of which they have been deprived, and reminding judges that the destruction of the national healthcare system is a crime infinitely more serious than leaving one's home without a self-certification form (Agamben 2021, 20).

Agamben's resistance to what became quotidian globally is obvious: how come that, given that epidemics have took place in the past, this is the first time a lockdown and a restriction on the freedom of movement is now in place (Agamben 2021, 18 and 28). The question is legitimate. The philosopher, too, needs to ask whether other measures could not likewise, and with more democratic legitimacy, curtail the raging pandemic. Agamben does not eschew the hyperboles however: barbarism and fascism are just around the corner (Agamben 2021, 34 and 41). Yet here too, Agamben poses some thoughtworthy questions: why, he asks, was there so little resistance in Europe to sometimes draconic measures (Agamben 2021, 23)? It is surprising, indeed, that societies characterized by a lacking 'belief in politics' followed most of these measures without much ado.

Next to the restrictions on the freedom of movement, another event riled Agamben a bit more: the fact that in Italy during the first wave "our dear ones […] should not only die alone, but that their bodies should be burned without a funeral" (Agamben 2021, 35). Circumstances like these have made

Agamben think about the ethical and political consequences of the pandemic. Those consequences are multiple.

There is first of all no legal basis for the measures taken by most governments. Agamben regularly refers to the end of "bourgeois democracy" through executive power increasingly hollowing out legislative power. This ultimately entails the end of the separation of powers, in the process of which it becomes unclear whether we are dealing with democracy on its way to sheer despotism or, worse still, are already living in a totalitarian state (Agamben 2021, 36, 42 and 60). Sloterdijk, here, is largely sympathetic towards Agamben's approach and remarks similarly that we should stop this "unhealthy applause for these neo-authoritarian tendencies […] where the roads [from] to decision-making [to] execution have become unusually short" (Sloterdijk 2021, 67 and 107). It must be noted in effect that, in many countries in Europe, it is the word of leaders that have not even been elected, that becomes law. Agamben sardonically remarks that it has been since the Führer that such was the case (Agamben 2021, 36-7). Agamben, however, asks just how long one can maintain such a state of exception, especially when it is apparent that once such a state of exception settles in there is no way back to a previous situation—the state of exception is a state of exception precisely because it is entirely without *checks and balances* (Agamben 2021, 83).

The political consequences of the corona policies loom large, especially now the executive powers are aided by science in general and medicine in particular. A novel aspect in this health crisis is in effect that the word of the doctor (in a broad sense) has become law too. Agamben seems to react—in part— to the health hype raging through our societies. This would concern "a religion of health" because its main goal is not to recover, through a one-time medication or therapy, but rather to remain healthy always and everywhere (Agamben 2021, 18, 29 and 51). It is, however, one thing to point to the omnipresence of such a religion of health—the majority of lifestyle magazines testify to this indeed—it is something else entirely to interpret the measures against the transmission of the coronavirus solely from this perspective.

It is in effect too big a leap to jump from the omnipresence of a health hype to the impositions of corona measures in the entire world, even when these have the appearances of an obsessive compulsion towards sanitization (masks, alcohol gels, and so on). These measures can be interpreted otherwise than a society that would deliberately cut all social, political, and public bonds and so reduce itself to 'bare life', a life that is not worth living yet is perpetuated at all costs. This is, however, exactly what Agamben says is happening (Agamben 2021, 18). It can indeed be tempting to interpret the face mask duty, the curfew, or those restrictions that determine how many people one can meet as the dawn of an evil 'biopolitical' power that has no other intentions than to make the population increasingly obedient and passive. Such an "abolition of public space" (Agamben 2021, 19) needs to give rise to thought: is it legitimate at all? How long can such a state be maintained without losing its legitimacy at all; how to return to prior states? And so on.

Yet this abolition could mean something else than what Agamben focuses on, namely the extraction of vegetative life out of the surgery room and into the socio-cultural milieu (Agamben 2021, 35 and 64). Agamben's rigidity forces him to choose between *either* bare life *or* a completely politicized 'good life'. A transition from the one to another or the idea that the one has a bearing on the other is, for him at least, unthinkable. It is for this reason that Agamben cannot accept that at times bare life needs to be preserved simply in order for the good life to be able to resume.

One can conclude that in Agamben's case we are dealing with a sort of philosophical tunnel vision which prevents him from interpreting certain ideas, for instance the one stating that "the pandemic is […] first and foremost a political concept" (Agamben 2021, 53) otherwise than his (earlier) philosophy dictates. Already in his *The State of Exception*, for instance, Agamben shows that legislation by decrees, where executive power in a way sidetracks the legislative power of the parliament, is on the rise since World War I and has now become standard practice in most democracies. Agamben's remarks about the science of medicine seems to be new terrain,

however, although one can find in his *Homo Sacer* an intriguing discussion of an irreversible coma, in which a patient is kept alive only by technological means. Life and death, according to Agamben, are here no longer simply biological concepts but have become thoroughly political. Life and death, in this manner, become part and parcel of the biopolitical and sovereign execution of power.[3] It appears that it is exactly Agamben's philosophical system that hinders him to take sufficient distance from the event that the coronavirus affects governments as well as for citizens.

2. Jean-Luc Nancy's Response to Agamben

Nancy's *Un trop humain virus* (Nancy 2020), published in the very year the virus broke out, reads as a long response to Agamben' surprising statements about Italy's dealing with the coronavirus. Nancy's book, too, collects essays written for specific occasions. One cannot, however, begin describing Nancy's response without first pointing to an incident, if you like, between the two men that played out some time ago. It is well-known that Nancy has had a heart transplant—he relates this event in his essay *The Intruder* (Nancy 2008b, 161-170). Nancy now reports that Agamben was the only one who tried to talk him out of surgery. Even then, a life that could only be maintained through medical and technological interventions didn't seem worth living. Yet Nancy is very clear that without this intervention he would no longer live (Nancy 2021, 27).

Nancy mentions Agamben rather late in his book. It is clear from the outset that his stance is diametrically opposed to Agamben's. Whereas the latter reports that the corona measures reduce our existences to "bare life" and this "bare life, and the fear of losing it, is not something that unites people; rather, it blinds and separates them" because the other "must [be] avoided at all costs" (Agamben 2021, 18), Nancy describes the virus as a "communovirus"—in an essay dating from March 25 2020 immediately after the first lockdowns in Europe:

> The virus communizes us. It puts us all on equal footing […] and gathers us for a shared frontline. That this happens through the isolation of us all is but a paradoxical way to point to our community.

> One is only unique amidst all. This is what makes our most intimate community: the shared sense of unicity (Nancy 2020, 23).

The virus thus functions as a leveler through making visible, once again, the "sovereign right of death" (Nancy 2020, 30). It does this through introducing a death into the public realm "for which there is no protection" (Nancy 2020, 93), not at the time at least. In certain regions, death is suddenly everywhere whereas, in Europe, there have been efforts for decades to ban death from the center of public life. Cemeteries, for example, are most often at the outskirts of town.

Nancy too revisits his earlier philosophy to understand the contemporary crisis. In his last study of community, he points to camaraderie and companionship as the most noble aspect of human existence in society, a society that is no longer founded from without, be it through a divine government or by a utopian goal, as the moderns still believed.[4] It is on this plane, too, that Nancy's thought on sovereignty needs to be situated: no subject is, whether it be from without—a divine subject—or from within—a nation-state for instance—steering society or otherwise organizing the human community.

One cannot detect in Nancy, however, a (holistic) naiveté. Even though the virus "reminds" us of the "interdependency" (Nancy 2020, 23) of all with all, it reveals and accelerates tendencies that are present in our culture since modernity. The virus puts a "magnifying glass" on our history, a history in which "humans" permanently "do violence to the human" (Nancy 2020, 73 and 39).

Nancy does not shy away from bombast. Yet it is hard to deny that the virus did put the entire world on hold: schools closed, companies faced bankruptcy, and the economy and trade are no longer the sovereign rulers they used to be. Whereas before the crisis, some, echoing Margaret Thatcher, stated that 'There is no alternative' it is precisely the opposite that is true. Bruno Latour made this observation immediately after the outbreak (Latour 2020).

According to Nancy, we have to ask what world exactly is coming to a halt. Since modernity we are living in a world "where technical and political mastery appears to be its own goal. This turns the world into a tense force field, in which

these forces tend to come into conflict more and more, divested of all civilizing alibis that were operative before" (Nancy 2020, 17) to the point one should ask, even, whether we still want a civilization at all (Nancy 2012, 62n.). A few things are important here. First, science and technology serve no other end than themselves: it is the master of the world solely to master the world (and no longer to obtain an ultimate goal such as progress or liberation). Secondly, through science and technology the world is turned into a technical body. If there would still be something natural about this world, we have lost the ability to isolate and define such "naturalness". Everything is always and already interwoven with the human and with its artifacts. Nothing, then, is "natural", and certainly not when this would mean that one or the other institution or situation is deemed permanent or self-evident. What *appears* natural is a historical construction just as much as everything else. Here, too, Nancy's philosophy is descriptive of the fleetingness of all beings. In this way, Nancy points to the construction of sense and of meaning. Behind (or beyond) such meaning, there is no longer a "natural order" that would so be uncovered.

What kind of world does the virus show us exactly? A world in which growth is, perhaps for the first time, questioned and which collapses through the excesses it desired for itself. Even though the virus travels "via the routes and the rhythms of the global circulation of the goods of trade", it does not touch us all in an equal manner. On the contrary, it sheds "new light on the inequalities in the world today": how in effect does one wash one's hands regularly if there is no water at disposal? Nancy points to these inequalities on many levels: from the vulnerable families living in social housing who didn't have gardens during the lockdowns and small companies going bankrupt to Amazon whose profit during this crisis was bigger than ever. It is this gap which for Nancy is detestable and in the end no less than "obscene". Just because there is no one guiding this world, neither from beyond nor from within the world, equality for Nancy becomes no less than an "existential demand" (all these quotes (Nancy 2020, 31-2).[5] It is here that his stance against Agamben takes root: there is no liberating potential at all in Agamben's hyper-individualistic, neoliberal

and, as we will see, neoviral account (Cf. Nancy 2020, 61), it just plays into the hands of the already privileged.

Such inequality bothers Nancy on a metaphysical level too, however. In a world where death awaits us all, it is no less than our duty to let each and every one live a life that is as good as possible: "there is no reason why there would be 'wretched of life' (and so lives of the wretched) if the reason of our being is to live and to die, not the accumulation of goods, of power, or of knowledge" (Nancy 2020, 85). The accumulation of the latter may never be a goal in itself; it should always be at the service of those whose only fate it is to live and to die, those, Bruno Latour will write, "that recognize that they are born, that they are in need of care and that they have predecessors and successors" (Latour 2021, 51). The human being, for Nancy too, appears as a being that needs care before he or she is a consumer, a worker or, worse still, falls prey to an algorithm.

What causes this world to break down and how does the coronavirus show this precisely? Here Nancy indicates a peculiar metaphysical situation. Evil, Nancy notes, in the metaphysical tradition was always characterized as a privation: evil is the absence of the good, it is what lacks the good. Now, however, just that which we deemed as and desired to be the good fails us and causes trouble:

> It is the Good of our conquering the world that appears to be destructive—and for this reason makes clear it is autodestructive. Excess destroys excess, speed kills speed, health endangers health, riches in the end seems to ruin itself—without anything returning to the poor (Nancy 2020, 39).

Nancy so envisions the passage from modernity to postmodernity: we have come to the point at which the conquering of the world becomes a sheer *creation* of world. The discovery is no longer the encountering of something 'already there', we now create what will be factual and, as a consequence, think that we construct and control the world.

We need not uncritically assume that Nancy's apocalyptical stance over and against the mutation of our culture is correct (Schrijvers 2016, 72-82). For Nancy, however, our society suffers from a 'spiritual poverty': "the spirit suffocates in the computational" (Nancy 2020, 33) in algorithms of all kinds

and in the omnipresence of calculus. Commentators agree: for Nancy, "the pandemic is a symptom of our disequilibrated spiritual, not merely biological, life" (Horváth 2023, 145).

Meanwhile the virus literally takes our breath and it is not certain that we will ever find the space to breathe freely again. The sheer power of the virus is linked "to a complex of factors and agents [that] are also at stake in pollution, the disappearance of biodiversity, poisoning through pesticides, deforestation, famine [and] social and moral decomposition" (Nancy 2020, 37-8). In this regard, one can call the outbreak of the virus "deliberate [*délibéréé*]" (Nancy 2020, 37): we could have known—not in the least because the state of the art in virology is such that quite a few warnings about an outbreak had already been uttered. It is remarkable that Žižek, too, will focus on this 'not wanting to know' in his analysis of the corona- and climate crisis (Žižek 2020, 140).

When Nancy turns, to the deeper conditions of possibility of the coronavirus, he in effect turns against what he calls *neoviralism*, where each and everyone is free to protect oneself from the virus in a manner he or she chooses, and in which one may recognize Agamben's position. "The whole of crises," Nancy writes,

> to which we fall prey […] arises out of the unlimited extension of the free use of the available […] resources with an eye to a production that has no other finality than itself and its own power. The virus is an occasion for us to signal that there are in effect limits (Nancy 2020, 50).

Whoever wants to curtail this virus cannot make an appeal to nature, as these neoviralists are prone to do when calling for a herd immunity in which the strong will survive, but will need to address "the techno-scientific [and] practical socio-economic conditions" that made this virus possible and which make for the fact that the problem is exactly "our concept itself of society, of its finality and its true stakes" (Nancy 2020, 49).

Yet the neoviralists complain that there is no longer any freedom. Our democracies, which should guarantee the freedom and equality of their citizens, would have reached the tipping-point of turning into a dictatorship. We need to realize, too, that Nancy did not have access to Agamben's book, but likely heard

about Agamben's blogs. Nancy too talks about health: it may well be the case that "health has become one more product of consumption and that a long life has become a value in itself," but even if this is the case "one does not answer to this situation by exposing the entire world to the risks that come from all sides in our techno-economical systems" (Nancy 2020, 46).

On the contrary, such a neoviralism simply rehashes the egoistic 'every man for himself' of neoliberalism. It is based on an abstract and modern idea of human freedom and autonomy that is in no way grounded in our thrownness in a *determinate*, indeed already technical and economical, world. It does not reckon with what Nancy calls our "inscription in a world" (Cf. Nancy 2020, 44), in which freedom and the concomitant independence always already has to take into account certain dependencies as well (from certain socio-economic and technical conditions). Freedom is not abstract and indeterminate. The freedom of the ones in a social housing quarter differs from those in villas with swimming pools. All these factors turn such neoviralism, where everyone is responsible only for him- or herself at the expense of "the useless and [the] unlucky elderly" (Nancy 2020, 49), into a repetition of neoliberalism where the unemployed, the deplorables and the retired sometimes seems to suffer a similar fate.

Nancy points to the fact that these neoviralists seem to have no other means to turn to than the so-called herd immunity in their respective response to the health crisis caused by corona. In this particular case, then, Nancy remarks, "it is about nature that the neoviralists speak without saying so: a clever natural disposition allows for the liquidation of the virus" (Nancy 2020, 46). Nancy's conclusion then, unsurprisingly, is harsh: the position of neoviralism is nothing less than the intellectual equivalent of violent rioters and the argument of an "abstract heroism," in which each and every one faces the danger of the virus publicly and courageously, that really does not know what to say (Nancy 2020, 50, 35 and 98).

Nancy does go a long way with Agamben's concerns for a "biopolitics," where life and death are always and already a matter of politics, however. Nancy is ready to subscribe to the thesis that the "good life" does not coincide with the simple

absence or avoidance of the virus (Nancy 2020, 82). At this juncture, in effect, one needs to note the reduction to naked life for which Agamben warns. Yet this does not mean that avoiding the political and cultural interference with public health would automatically entail the "good life": health care, too, is entwined in ever-changing technological and social conditions. We need to rethink what the "good life" today might mean, certainly, but one cannot do this without taking these altered conditions into account through, for instance, "not even caring about health" (Nancy 2020, 98). This is why some have argued that through biopolitics alone one, for Nancy, "does not grasp the situation in which we find ourselves" (Sugiera 2023, 240). Agamben's stubborn stance resembles Michel Foucault's position when the latter refused treatment for AIDS or Ivan Illich who rejected care for his cancer.

We, however, need to reckon with the facts that diseases are no longer "natural" or individual, but are always and already embedded in a social body. The illness of one always demanded the help of the other. The virus that plagued us demands that all connections and links of the social web come into play: science rapidly created vaccines, economics throve on working from home, and so on. The "good life" cannot *not* be related to the questions that arise out of these (new) connections and their technical conditions. What to expect from life, and from health care, now that people on average grow older than 75? Health care, too, is subject to change and encounters new questions for philosophy. For Nancy, we need to ask what exactly is at stake when technical and medical possibilities change over time. "When neurosis was not named as such yet, and was not yet present in societal debates, it was not yet the subject of medical care" (Nancy 2020, 97). It is from the moment that neurosis was coined and received treatment that an entirely new constellation of connections between technological, economical and societal conditions opened up which thinking just cannot dismiss. Diseases and viruses take place in a technical culture and through these technical conditions. It is precisely this culture that needs to bring a cure. Technology, in a sense, is at once the poison and the remedy but it makes no sense to try to separate these technical means

artificially from a pristine "natural state". It is this that makes for the difficulties surrounding the question of the human: the human being is "too much" and "too little" human at the same time: too much culture to be identical to nature and enough nature to not coincide with culture.

We will see later how Nancy's attempt to come up with a new image of the human leads him to quite the quietist position: it is as if one might see some sort of spiritual resignation over and against the questions of our day in Nancy's latest work. In every case, it is as if Nancy speaks from out of the stillness that we, sometimes literally, experienced at the beginnings of the first lockdowns, whereas Agamben speaks from out of the impatience, or indignation even, over some corona measures that some started to feel later. In conclusion we might now state that if Agamben fears for a life that is politicized from beginning to end, Nancy's thought is almost the mirror image when pleading for an existence that never can be politicized completely since it is, all things together, free from biopolitical intrusion (or at least never coincides with it completely) and never falls prey to a complete reduction to either a natural or culture phenomenon.

3. Sovereignty in The Age of (Mis)Information: Other Critics of Agamben

Needless to say, Agamben's writings have stirred up quite some debate. Nancy was surely not the only one who must have frowned when reading those blogs. What has less been noted, is that these critiques seem to play into the cards of Nancy's general philosophical response to Agamben. In conclusion to this essay, we will therefore point to two such critiques. First, there is what one could call Agamben's misjudgment when it comes to current age of information and, secondly, we will show how this misjudgment leads, through a reading of Agamben's critics, to a different account of sovereignty in the contemporary world.

It is indeed remarkable that commentators agreeing with Nancy, stating that it is precisely this "mixture of all beings" (Latour 2021, 31 and 103), as Latour has it, or this "interconnectedness" of all with all that needs to be analyzed

(Fishel and Agius 2024, 9), confirm exactly the point of some of Agamben's critics who argue that he underestimates the multilayered facets of contemporary society. This is most obvious in Christiaens' account of the "networked public sphere" (Christiaens 2022, 412-4) in which we find ourselves, as Nancy himself has it, in an "ocean of discourses" (Nancy 2020, 77). In such a "multitude of clustered opinions" and "chaotic proliferation of inconsistent communications" (resp. Christiaens 2022, 413 and 412), it is not the "the complacency of the public or the standardization of public opinion" (Christiaens 2022, 412) that, as Agamben does, ought to be criticized. On a more metaphysical level, one ought to say that at issue, here, is not a sovereign state that one-dimensionally seeks to push its civilians, through one or the other biopolitical hidden agenda, into servitude. On the contrary, in such an "age of information" (Cf. Heidegger 1991, 29), information always already is interconnected with misinformation and disinformation. Nancy, too, reflects on this overload of information: there is too much of it, we talk about it endlessly and this whirlwind sweeps us away (Nancy 2020, 77 and 36). As a result, information is not the transfer from the knower—the state—to those that ought to know but do not yet know—the public. There is, if you like, no sovereign transport of the law (nor of the exception) to all civilians. Rather, one could say, each of the civilians attempts to be its his or her own sovereign.

Nancy quite quickly saw that the state's measures against the coronavirus are not just, as Agamben argues, the expansion of the sovereign state of exception to contemporary COVID-ridden society (Agamben, 2021, 18). On the contrary, Agamben's tendency to see just such an expansion in the corona measures, that is, "the expansion of the state of exception to engulf the normal state itself, so that exception is […] is no longer distinct from it" (Prozorov 2023,68) reveals a general tendency of Agamben's thought. The tendency, in short, to see the sovereign exception of the law always and everywhere.

Nancy, however, begins his book by stating exactly the opposite: "The inevitable repetition of 'emergency measures' causes the ghost of Carl Schmitt to emerge, through a sort of hasty amalgam" (Nancy 2020, 15). The crisis the coronavirus

reveals, for Nancy, is not a biopolitical one, nor just a political one but rather takes on spiritual-ontological traits that concerns human civilization in general. For, just as one cannot separate a supposedly "natural" virus from all the societal and technical conditions causing it, so too one cannot set the works of the sovereign apart from the state in which these are executed. One might say: one knows about sovereignty only through its effects and not through its cause. This means that sovereignty, for Nancy, will have to oblige to the wider ontological condition that he names, early on, as "singular plural" (Nancy 1996, 89). One knows of the singular only through its plural taking place, just as one knows of the plural modes of existence through the existence of the singular. This means that one knows about *the* sovereign only through the sometimes very diverse sovereignties taking place, just as one catches a glimpse of this plurality through the idea of the one sovereign one already has. This logic, too, is present in Nancy's idea of the "communovirus" mentioned above: in the isolation caused by the lockdowns, one gathers that "one is only unique amidst all" (Nancy 2020, 23), it is in the multitudes, in the "plural" that one is alone and "singular". The idea of unicity therefore is always and already shared. The idea of sovereignty, of *the* sovereign therefore, always and already will need to be compared to other sovereignties and other sovereigns.

It does not help, Nancy thus argues, to see 'the state of exception' just about everywhere to face this crisis. This, however, is exactly what, according to Prozorov, Agamben does. The corona measures are not where we catch the sovereign in the act, as Agamben is prone to think, in order to argue that there is no line of demarcation between our democracies and totalitarianism. Rather, the "trope of indistinction" (Prozorov 2023, 69), through which all (empirical) emergency measures are *but* the actualization of a transcendental and sovereign claim to power, causes Agamben to miss the differences between the phenomena playing out in the coronacrisis. In this regard, not all perpetuation of health is, simply, a reduction to bare life, just as not all subsidies to the working class are a means to keep it docile. In its stead, Agamben can only see in these measures the transition of a free and open democracy to a

totalitarian state: every difference between them eventually collapses.

It is this point that the critics of Agamben adopt in unison: the emergency measures are not the acts of an omnipotent sovereign who would, always and everywhere, decree the same exceptions to the law. With Nancy, these critics seem to agree that there is no such thing as an absolute sovereign. If anything, this absoluteness of the one sovereign would always be divided, and divested to other sovereignties. This was obvious already from Agamben's misjudgment of the media, and the topic of medicine in the media: there is no one single transfer from an omnipotent state to its subservient citizens. Quite a few of these critics critique Agamben's account of the sovereign in corona times similarly and point to Walter Benjamin's account of the sovereign who is, in any case, unable to decide on the state of exception (Benjamin 2003, 71). As Prozorov argues: "given the initial [and] ongoing uncertainty and lack of knowledge regarding the origins and effects of the coronavirus, the states of exception introduced by governments worldwide can hardly appear as signs of their omnipotence but rather reflect their impotence in the face of the situation that is genuinely exceptional, not as a result of any sovereign decision but largely irrespective of it" (Prozorov 2023, 71).[6]

Nancy's writings on sovereignty are not many. Yet they are to be framed into his larger framework of transcendence, of the event of the world (as the sole place of transcendence). Sovereignty, for Nancy, is therefore the question of the "summit" and its "relation to the base" (Nancy 2002, 155). Sovereignty has to do with "height", with "altitude in itself", with transcend*ing* rather than the transcendent one used to call God.

From these writings on sovereignty, it becomes clear that Nancy, too, sides with Benjamin. This explains his stance against Agamben. Nancy, however, would less than Benjamin focus on the ultimate undecidability that haunts the sovereign but all the more on "the exercise of sovereignty" (Nancy 2002, 151) which, in the end, eludes the sovereign too: he or she "is the subject of the exercise to which [he or she] is subjected" (Nancy 2002, 152)

This is the case because for Nancy, sovereignty, is not a property of one or the other subject, but rather a quality, as the medievals would have called it, of reality. If, here or there, a sovereign decision would need to be made, then this sovereign too would be subjected to the transcending taking place in the (metaphysical) event of world in which this decision would need to be compared to other sovereignties happening on the very same plane—of world that is. No matter how high this sovereign would like to place him- or herself, the execution of his or her power is subjected still to its happening within in the world. Contra Agamben, then, there is no sovereign to be caught in the act, there is just the act of sovereignty and even then, just only for a little while, just long enough for the sovereign to realize that he, or she, too is subject to what happens to him or her in a sovereign manner. With Schmitt, Nancy believes that there are sovereign decisions that suspend the law and enforce decisions from the summit to the base. With Benjamin, however, Nancy would contend that these decisions and whatever program the sovereign wants to execute, whatever goal he (or she) wants to attain, these goals and programs, and their execution by the sovereign are in the end subjected to the sovereign happening of world all the same.

Here Nancy is in effect close once again to Benjamin since the sovereign operates in the terrain carved out by the catastrophe that forces him or her to decide. The sovereign is in no way whatsoever outside the event of world. Whereas Agamben is closer here to Carl Schmitt, Nancy sides with Benjamin: if for Schmitt, the sovereign, when facing an event (such as the corona crisis) needs to decide upon a course of action and will enforce this decision on its citizens, for Benjamin, the sovereign operates in all cases after the event, following the event. It is the event that will have made the sovereign decide so and so and is so forced upon the sovereign and its citizens.

It is this happening of the world, this event of the world, which for Nancy subjects us all and which ultimately makes him turn to what almost seems a spiritual vocabulary in his book on the coronavirus.

4. Conclusion: Toward A World Without (a) Sovereign

The event of world trumps all acts of sovereignty, and in this world all are connected to all. Nancy is not blind to the domination, today, of capitalism and consumerism—of one phenomenon overshadowing all the others. The "empty place of power," proper to democracy through "sharing out" sovereignty for only four years or so, today has been filled in completely through a "multitude [of] consumer goods" and through a society of the spectacle which absorbs and will potentially destroy our very freedom (Nancy 2020, 59). Each owner, each accumulator of goods, so seems to turn into its very own sovereign. Capitalism suffocates "the spirit of democracy [which] is the breath of the human being" (Nancy 2008, 31). All across the world one can detect a hardening and stifling of identity and its concomitant politics.

Nancy's message, if any, here is strangely spiritual: we again need "to learn to breathe and live" again (Nancy 2020, 33) in times when it is unclear what we still want is a civilization. Even if all programs, goals and anticipations are ultimately incomplete, because subjected to the finite event of world—and the virus is one forceful reminder of such finitude—relations still start and connections are made, "this is what is beautiful" (Nancy 2020, 74).

All this is very true. Yet it leaves this author, and probably some of his readers, to wonder: if there is too much of critique of our institutions in Agamben, to the point one asks whether for Agamben the measures, and the institutions itself, are ever justified, one could query whether in Nancy there is enough critique of our institutions, even the democratic ones. There seems to be no genuine political philosophy in Nancy. And though the critics of Agamben we discussed affirm Nancy's position—no one really knows what the virus, and the future of the event of the world, will bring—there is little, next to nothing discussion in Nancy about our current institutions. It is, perhaps, easy, to speak of the transcending that is the event of world, but it is necessary, too, to speak about the sedimented, and instituted, senses of transcendence within our very world.

In absence of this, Nancy risks to affirm the status quo much more than Agamben will ever do.

Yet, and again, we never know what is going to happen and, ultimately, Nancy is right when stating that the virus forced us to recognize our world as a world without a sovereign. Despite the attempts, always and everywhere, to consume more goods, gather more property and power, despite all instrumental rationality "we know spontaneously [...] that the 'without reason', is stronger, more intense, than all reason. Like the blooming of a flower, a smile or a song" (Nancy 2020, 86).

Nancy here approaches the mysticism of Silesius: just as "the rose is without why," we need to accept that there is no standard for our appearing and disappearing in this world, that things in effect come to pass and that what we "share" is precisely this uncertainty, this coming to pass and tragic "foundering" (Nancy 2020, 110). "Can we turn this 'without reason' into a measure for our civilization?" (Nancy 2020, 85). This is the question that philosophy poses, but cannot answer, and though some might argue that with such a fluid account of sovereignty one loses sight of the true state of politics, it is, on the other hand, good to be reminded, first, that not a single one can lay claim permanently on sovereign power and that therefore no one can pretend to speak for the entire community once and for all and, secondly, that if a sovereign were to arise, he (or she) too will be subjected to…Sooner or later.

NOTES

[1] Parts of the first two sections of this essay have been published, in Dutch, as "De filosoof en het virus. Continentaalfilosofische reacties in op het coronavirus", in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 83 (2021) 517-543. I thank the publishers for their permission to reprint these here.

[2] A first response to these blogs is gathered in (Castillon and Marchevsky 2021).

[3] It is this power that can kill me *just by* keeping me alive and, vice versa, let me live while I am dead already. For these two anticipations in Agamben's thought, see (Agamben 2005, 12-13 and (Agamben 1998, 160-166).

[4] See (Nancy 2013, 121 and 141), where the "communion of companions" does not unite them before a shared project but is rather characterized through a certain fleetingness, a passing recognition which also plays in the greeting of

the other or in shared interests, as when one is delighted in the fact that the other has read the same novel.

[5] It would distract to show why equality for Nancy is a "principle of reality", see for this (Nancy 2008, 46-7).

[6] On this turn to Benjamin, see also (Salzani 2021). See also Agamben's discussion of these theses of Benjamin in (Agamben 2002, 52-64).

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Ethics of Hermeneutics: Heideggerian Resoluteness as a Meta-virtue

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Abstract

The relevance of *φρόνησις* to the hermeneutic turn in phenomenology is documented in a course conducted by Heidegger during the WS 1924/5. *Φρόνησις* offers a paradigm for authentic existence, demanding a conversion of the soul and the acquisition of a new worldview. While the intellect abstracts from the *pathe* of sensibility, *φρόνησις*, as its perfection, entails pursuing the universal good, which the former presents as its destination. This concept aligns with the Kantian notion of wisdom: a practical interpretation of the world achievable only through ethical striving for the highest good. However, the consistency of the latter has often been questioned, as its reality implies a moral author of the world, generally considered at odds with autonomy. This impasse still provides a deeper insight on a meta-virtue required by *φρόνησις* – resoluteness – defined by its insistence on a gaze capable of discerning qualitative difference among the various phenomena we encounter.

Introduction

Few are the attempts to draw an ethics out of the works of Heidegger. And this is not surprising. First of all, his political engagement casts an ominous shadow on an eventual practical development of his philosophy. Furthermore, a moral interpretation of *Being and Time* has been rejected on several occasions: one need only to consider the answer given to the request for a clarification of the relationship between ontology and ethics made by Beaufret, who was replied that the aforementioned dichotomy is derivative and therefore

misleading (Heidegger 1976b, 353). On the other hand, just a few pages later a more originary way to understand $\tilde{\eta}\theta o\varsigma$ is put forward: "ethics ponders the abode of the human being", "thinking which thinks the truth of being as the primordial element of the human being, as the one who eksists, is in itself originary ethics" (ivi, 354).

While the originary ethics is worthy to be mentioned as it confirms the practical outcome of Heidegger's later thought, we shall not delve into its implications for it would be almost pointless outside of the so-called ontohistorical thinking. More interesting is the emphasis given to practice in the courses which precede the publication of his 1927 masterpiece, where the relevance of $\varphi\rho\dot{o}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ as a dianoetic perfection to the hermeneutic turn of phenomenology is well documented. In parallel, in a 1924 conference on the concept of time, Heidegger praises the formalism inherent in Kantian practical philosophy, contrasting it with the material ethics of values due to an original connection with the call of moral consciousness. I believe that, in both cases, a stark criticism towards Husserl and his theoreticism is at stake.[1] The father of phenomenology discovered the intentionality constitutive of every experience and yet he failed to clarify the specific essence of the consciousness, reducing its inner phenomena to theoretical noemata. In a 1925 lecture course, the limits of his system of thought are so pinpointed:

> "Every directing-itself-toward (fear, hope, love) has the feature of directing-it-self-toward which Husserl call *noesis*. Inasmuch as *noein* is taken from the sphere of theoretical knowing, any exposition of the practical sphere here is drawn from the theoretical" (Heidegger 1995a, 60-1).[2]

Husserl is guided by the ideal of a universal $\mu\dot{a}\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$, a form of will-to-be-certain which haunts the history of philosophy as a whole and the modernity in particular, so as to cover the pre-theoretical dimension in which human beings actually live. This kind of rigorous science is to be substituted by hermeneutics as self-interpretation of the effective life, where the genitive is meant both as subjective and objective. From time to time, understanding life comprehends itself in its dynamic identity, which unfolds through the anticipation of its

myriad possibilities. This should be sufficient to attest to Heidegger's interest in *πρᾶξις* and the possibility of investigating the ethical phenomenon in his works. Furthermore, the analysis of both the Aristotelian notion of *φρόνησις* and the Kantian notion of *Gewissen* still plays a role in the second section of *Being and Time*, where another concept is introduced: resoluteness, as a resemantization of the more traditional virtue of moral fortitude.

This paper mainly focuses on resoluteness, a concept that is nearly forgotten in contemporary attempts to develop an ethics of hermeneutics; yet it may still resolve some impasses. Firstly, I will provide a brief overview of the recent history of hermeneutic ethics and then proceed to demonstrate through the use of practical syllogism the problems it currently faces: essentially, I will show the lack of adequate consideration for the major premise, left to an arbitrary game of interpretations (2). Secondly, I will examine the paradigm of resoluteness in *Being and Time* to suggest a way out of the aforementioned deadlock. In particular, I will first focus on its Aristotelian roots (3) and then on the Kantian ones (4). Finally, I will illustrate how resoluteness serves as a negative meta-virtue, acting as a material condition to address some of the issues of ethical nihilism, while also indicating a path to find a more positive guiding criterion (5).

1. Ethics of Hermeneutics: an historical overview

Although Heidegger rejects a radical opposition between theory and practice regarding resolute self-appropriation, many of his students expressed astonishment at his vigorous speculation's ability to arouse vital interests.[3] Gadamer's testimony holds particular significance for our research, as the integration of ethics and hermeneutics is a hallmark of his work. In an essay dedicated to Heidegger and his tenure at Marburg, Gadamer provides insight into a seminar he attended on the *Nichomachean Ethics*, with a specific focus on the analysis of *φρόνησις*. Having outlined the limitations of *τέχνη* as a form of knowledge unaccountable for the usage of its products, Heidegger proceeded to distinguish *φρόνησις* from theoretical knowledge and other attainable competences: "there

is oblivion of those kinds of habits, but not of *φρόνησις*" (EN VI 9, 1140b 29). Subsequently, he abruptly introduced the concept of consciousness (*das Gewissen*) to his students, prompting his most insightful pupil to recall this pivotal moment in such a way:

> Today it is clear what Heidegger found in it, and what so fascinated him in Aristotle's critique of Plato's idea of the Good and the Aristotelian concept of practical knowledge. They described a mode of knowledge that could no longer be based in any way on a final objectifiability in the sense of science. They described, in other words, knowledge within the concrete situation of existence (Gadamer 1977, 201-2).

These remarks find solid confirmation in the first two hundred pages of Heidegger's commentary on Plato's *Sophist*, where *φρόνησις* is examined as a mode of *τὸ ἀληθεύειν*, that is, as the discovery of a province of being, particularly that of human existence. However, such opposition to theoretical knowledge is only derivative, and the emphasis placed on it primarily reflects Gadamer's own interests. In reality, we must either deny any relevance of theory to practice or even any consistency to every philosophical works or we must acknowledge that what is criticized is only an inauthentic form of speculation (Sadler 1996, 148; Thanassas 2012, 57). What justifies the refusal of a naturalistic understanding typical of modernity, which eliminates the difference between our existence and present-to-hand object, is instead a desire for a more adequate comprehension of human existence.

On the other hand, Gadamer appears primarily concerned with seeking an alternative to a paradigm of disembodied knowledge, which can be traced back to Kantian legalism, neglectful of the uniqueness and irreplicability of each practical situation (2013, 322-4). In this vein, he drafts a philosophical ethics that is not intended to be merely situational, as it also considers the ultimate aims of action. If these aims are not virtuous, there is no *φρόνησις* but rather *πανουργία* or *δεινότης*: essentially, mere cleverness. Gadamer opposes the Platonic paradigm of a shallow universality that is univocally valid in every circumstance. He argues that moral conscience is necessary to perceive the concrete situation in the light of the duties it imposes. However, there is little discussion about how to establish the above-mentioned, if "the right end is

not a mere object of knowledge" and "there can be no anterior certainty concerning what the good life is directed toward as a whole" (ivi, 331). An essay on the nature of the good between Plato and Aristotle exacerbates the dilemma, identifying the question of good with the matter of the "best-ness" of the citizen in the polis: a historically determined and thereby contingent ἦθος (1986, 21).[4]

Hannah Arendt's purposes are similar, as she recovers a paradigm of rationality from the third *Critique* of Kant as opposed to his *Critique of Practical Reason*. Special focus is given to aesthetic judgment, which aligns with the principle of enlarged or broad-minded thought to serve as a model for democratic political thinking. In both scenarios, indeed, communicability serves as the criterion for making decisions that cannot be immediately categorized under a given rule (Arendt 1982, 124).[5] Thereafter, the power of judgment is equated with the φρόνησις or insight, which the Greeks "considered the principal virtue or excellence of the statesman in distinction from the wisdom of the philosopher" (ivi, 140). Arendt completely ignores the second *Critique*, and elsewhere "her chief reservations about Kant" are said to "concern precisely his moral philosophy" (ivi, 222). Such a partial reading presents two drawbacks: on an exegetical level, it offers limited insight into the notion of judgment; on an ethical level, a complete rejection of a criterion that transcends mere dialogue initiates an anarchical game of interpretations where violent outcomes are always possible and, furthermore, not readily identifiable as such if dictated by the tyranny of the majority.

To summarize: the hermeneutic conversion of phenomenology is carried out under the sign of πρᾶξις. The works of Gadamer and Arendt converge in the resurgence of practical philosophy in Germany, rooted in Heidegger's earlier contributions (Riedel 1972; Volpi 1980, 11-97; Foster 1991). This resurgence addresses the need for an alternative to a modern paradigm of practical reason, which falls short in the judgment of unrepeatable ethical situations. Taking the practical syllogism as a basis, it is possible to talk about a crisis of its minor premise, which leads to an unsatisfactory

conclusion. Nevertheless, a correct balance is not achieved through this new hermeneutic paradigm. We have just discovered that what is now lacking is a criterion to decide on the major premise, leaving it to an unregulated game of interpretations that pave the way for ethical nihilism.[6] No wonder if in the past decades, a few studies attempted to initiate a dialogue between Aristotle and Kant, albeit typically only from the latter's perspective.[7] This paper will primarily emphasize the benefit of such a convergence, but from a different standpoint. It is quite conceivable that Aristotle and Kant hold divergent concepts of reason, leading to significant differences in their understanding of a rational life. This is why a return to Heidegger might prove profitable, as he lays the groundwork for a comparison between the two philosophers.

As I mentioned earlier, the analysis of *φρόνησις* still holds significance in the second section of *Being and Time*, and during these same years, Kant becomes a point of reference for how to conceive *Dasein*. In addition, when considering these perspectives, Heidegger highlights the centrality of another concept: that of resoluteness. Therefore, it is now imperative to explore a resolution to the crisis of the major premise of the practical syllogism within an investigation into the relationship between *φρόνησις* and resoluteness. In the first instance, I will summarize Heidegger's discussion on *φρόνησις* in the WS 1924/25 course and then I will trace its continued relevance with reference to resoluteness in the 1927 masterpiece.

2. The call of conscience: Heidegger's appropriation of φρόνησις

The aforementioned particularistic reading is supported by Aristotle's assertion of a noetic apprehension directed towards concrete beings as the outermost limit of deliberation: that is, of an immediate grasp which is no longer justifiable *μετά λόγου*. Yet, the manner *νόησις* is to be understood is not entirely clear, as it is said to differ from mere sensible perception, despite being somewhat similar to it. In fact, it "must be distinguished from the *αἴσθησις* in mathematics", which is "more of a pure grasping than the aisthesis of *φρόνησις*" (Heidegger 1992, 162; see also Volpi 1984, 90-116).

Since the latter is still related to practical matters, it is a form of circumspection rather than inspection. In other words, it is guided by the correctness of its purpose, the *εὐπραξία*, so that the grasped objects manifest "the character of the *συμφέρον*." Heidegger explicitly suggests that one needs to see the particular situation in the light of an anticipated universal, saying that research always "proceeds from the unarticulated *καθόλου* to the articulated *καθ'ἕκαστον*, so that every single *μέρος* becomes visible […] in its functional significance" (ivi, 89).[8] In parallel, we do have *νοῦς* only in an improper sense: precisely in a hermeneutical one, which compels us to take an interpretative stance toward every concrete situation. While the apprehension of the relevant circumstances concerns the second premise of the syllogism, the first one is up to *προαίρεσις*.

> From the *ἀρχή* on, from what I want to do, from my decision to act, all the way up to the completed action itself, *φρόνησις* belongs intrinsically to the acting. In every aspect of the acting, *φρόνησις* is co-constitutive. That means therefore that *φρόνησις* must make the action transparent from its *ἀρχή* up to its *τέλος*" (ivi, 147).

Given that volition is an integral part of *φρόνησις*, questions arise regarding the structure of volition and the correctness of its ends. Since *φρόνησις* represents a dianoetic perfection within man, its terms cannot be arbitrary, and we are in need of a criterion. The volitive phenomenon (*βουλεύεσθαι*) is defined as a "circumspective self-debate" (ivi, 143). In attempting to trace the outliving of *φρόνησις* in *Being and Time*, this definition facilitates the identification with circumspection as a central pillar in the analysis of average everydaynnes: whenever we have something to contribute or perform, it gives us "its route of procedure, the means of doing something, the right opportunity, the proper moment" (Heidegger 1976a, 228).[9] Of course, circumspection owns its specific excellence. Yet, in the WS 1924/5 course will is said to be correct on the basis of two different interpretations. On the one hand, the deliberation can be good even if the ends are not. In this case, "nothing can be objected against *φρόνησις* itself as regards the mode in which it has been formally carried out" (1992, 154). Conversely, the good could and should pertain to the proairetic moment as *εὐβουλία*: that is, to a decision

oriented toward a good end (as for the distinction between resoluteness-*Entschlossenheit* and decision-*Entscheidung*, cf. Fabris 2020).

> The *τέλος* of *φρόνησις* is not a *πρὸς τι* and not an *ἕνεκα τινός*: it is the *ἄνθρωπος* itself. *Αὕτη ἡ εὐπραξία τέλος* (NE VI, 1140b 7), the proper Being of man is the *τέλος*. But this is *ζωή πρακτική μετά λόγου*. The *τέλος* of *φρόνησις* is a *τέλος απλώς* and an *οὐ ἕνεκα*. […] *Dasein* is the *ἀρχή* of the deliberation of the *φρόνησις*. And what *φρόνησις* deliberates about is not what brings *πρᾶξις* to an end. The result is not constitutive for the Being of an action: only the *εὐ*, the how, is (Heidegger, 1992, 50).

Even if the continuous switch of the languages employed can be puzzling, the overall meaning of this section is plain: the aim of *φρόνησις* is the rightness in action, which is the same as the proper being of a man; then it is not about producing a specific result, but about one's general disposition toward the world and itself or how he behaves. The how as an *εὐ* is precisely the determinant factor in seeing the particulars under a moral light. But by which means do we become able to conceive this how? And in which manner does our gaze actually change? In a passage which attracted attention from several interpreters, Heidegger states that, analysing *φρόνησις*, the Stagyrite came across the phenomenon of moral conscience.

> *Φρόνησις* is nothing other than conscience set into motion. Conscience cannot be forgotten. But it is quite possible that what is disclosed by conscience can be distorted and allowed to be ineffective through *ἡδονή* and *λύπη*, through the passions. Conscience always announces itself (ivi, 56; on this topic, other than Gadamer and Volpi, see also Taminiaux 2002; Borgan 1989; 2005, 138-57).

Surely, *φρόνησις* is not mere circumspection. But, in antithesis to Gadamer's thesis, it is not simply moral conscience either. Rather, it is a syntonic answer to the call of conscience, an *ἀληθεύειν* which renders man transparent to himself. Such an answer requires a good decision and resoluteness in striving toward the good, so as to silence the disturbing noise produced by the heteronomous *πάθη* which makes conscience almost inaudible. Incidentally, it should be noted that Aristotle never talks about moral conscience and a similar interpretation is smoothly supported by Aquinas alone: provided that Aristotle mentions an *intellectus principiorum* as for the speculative

intellection, then something analogous must exist as for the practical intellect (ST I, 79, 12) – that is synderesis, the *habitus* with reference to which conscience represents the *actus* (ST I, 79, 13). Even if one may dismiss a connection apparently influenced by both authors' religious background, a more cautious reading might notice that the religious moment is only an interpretation of a phenomenological evidence. Furthermore, *φρόνησις* is a perfection of the intellect which enables its right usage. Given that we dispose of an intellect within a finite existence, conscience can be seen as the call our very essence addresses to us so that we live according to our highest possibility. As the Stagyrite synthetically suggests, "intellect is always correct" (*De Anima* III, 433a 27): for it determines our appetite, it compels us "to resist in sight of the future, while desire wants us to act on the basis of the present, because what is immediately pleasant appears to it as absolutely pleasant and absolutely good" (433b 8). Along the same line, Aristotle states that *σωφροσύνη* and temperance saves the *φρόνησις* (NE VI, 1140b 11). But provided that *φρόνησις* performs a resolute answer to the call of conscience, what does it actually enable to hear or to see? Its *ἀληθεύειν* grasps the being of man, who is a being-in-the-world. The interpretative lenses one requires to act morally need further clarification. Therefore, we should now move on to examine the 1927 existential analytic.

I believe that he most accurate translation of *φρόνησις* is still found in Gadamer's definition of "self-knowledge, i.e. knowledge-for-one-self" (2013, 326).[10] However, we must clarify which 'self' is being referred to and the semantic of a reasoned life. In *Being and Time* the call of consciousness is hearable through death, signalling a possibility which man "always has to take upon itself" (Heidegger 1976a, 333): "the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-being-there", whose profound significance undermines every contingent and mundane project. To live authentically means to self-appropriate such a finitude constitutive of our being, to which we are drawn by the resonance of consciousness every time the world fundamentally contradicts our vital projects.

> The finitude of existence thus seized upon tears one back out of endless multiplicity of possibilities offering themselves nearest by-

> those of comfort, shirking and taking things easy – and brings *Dasein* to the simplicity of its fate. This is how we designate the primordial occurrence of *Dasein* that lies in authentic resoluteness in which it hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility that it inherited and yet chosen (ivi, 507).

> Even when *Dasein* is "sure" of its "whither" in faith or thinks it knows about its whence in rational enlightenment, all of this makes no difference in the face of the phenomenal fact that moods bring *Dasein* before the that of its there, which stares at it with the inexorability of an *enigma* (ivi, 181).

Consciousness offers us an opportunity to resolutely become aware of a mysterious fate or to neglect it in the everydayness of our projects – or, in a more Aristotelian fashion, to be truthful to our essence as beings thrown in their own manifested mystery, or rather to betray our humanity. Aristotle would surely reject such an interpretation. Yet, fundamental disagreement would lean on a divergent conception of man and not on the tendency to elevate *φρόνησις* from a moral status to the ontological level of authenticity (as argued by Rosen 2002, 117-34). But, more importantly, the Stagyrite seemingly provides us with a criterion to act as the corpus of its ethical writings demonstrates, while Heidegger never writes an ethics. This is, perhaps, due to the indeterminacy we are left with, once resoluteness discloses a mystery of being which fails to provide any proper indications on how to behave. Apparently, we are given at most one negative admonishment: not to overestimate our secular projects. There is more to say: mystery is variously inhabitable, so that it can be argued that it is only because of an insufficient epistemic condition that we perceive it as such, and its true aspect may frustrate our moral expectations, leading to a nihilistic outcome. Even if we tried to resolutely see the particular situation, holding in sight the mystery of its provenance and destination, in the end, we would not gain any clear clue on what to do.

Heidegger however insists that the *εὐ* of the *εὐπραξία* is not a matter of what we do, but of how we act. In a 1924 conference on a concept of time, a similar opinion is attributed to the moral writings of Kant. After having defined the essence of authenticity, Heidegger praises the philosopher of

Königsberg for having determined the fundamental principle of his ethics in a formal way: "he perhaps knew from a familiarity with *Dasein* itself that it is its *how*" (Heidegger 2004, 117). This reference is important, since it reveals a side path which may help us deepen our understanding of the practical syllogism and of its major premise.

3. Kant: a moral vision of the world on the edge of the absurdum practicum

Beyond the common "formalism" of authenticity and practical reason, there are multiple points of contact between the accounts of moral person and factitious existence respectively given by Kant and Heidegger. The latter can be seen as a redefinition of the notorious *Factum der Vernunft*, as a self-affection of reason, whence consciousness springs as the sensible notification of its operativity. In addition, Kant seldom employs the term resoluteness and yet defines virtue as a "moral fortitude" (1991, 186). However, in order to appreciate these convergences and to seize the hermeneutical character of resoluteness, it is necessary to prepare the dialogical ground between Aristotelian and Kantian ethics.

a. On φρόνησις: prudence or wisdom?

There are many obstacles to the possibility of a comparison between Aristotle and Kant, as the latter usually presents his practical philosophy as a novelty in the whole history of philosophy. First and foremost, prudence is excluded from the realm of ethics and confined within the broad class of the hypothetical imperatives. In the *Groundwork*, a tripartite scheme is established, opposing technical and pragmatical to moral imperatives. Both the technical and the pragmatical ones fall under the category of the hypothetical imperative, for "whether the end is rational and good is not at all the question here but only what one must do in order to attain it" (Kant 2006, 26; see also Da Re 2020). The formers concern the rules to produce something in a correct way, while the latters involve the pursuit of individual happiness, an aim one can presuppose in human beings so that the precepts of prudence refer to a natural end, which does not need to be absolutely commanded.

Either the pursuit of happiness is demanded as a duty, or morality is to be found elsewhere. One possible way to interpret the aforementioned tripartion is to associate the technical rules of skill and the pragmatical counsels of prudence respectively to τέχνη and φρόνησις, understood as a deliberation over means with regard to different orders of purposes. Consequently, the categorical imperative of morality would be an absolute novelty in a stark opposition with all the previous ethics.

Kant probably sees it this way as he draws his polar contrasts, and perhaps not without textual support, provided that Aristotle believes "we deliberate not on ends but on what leads to the end" (NE III, 1112b 12).[11] However, we previously saw that the difference between φρόνησις and πανουργία precisely lies in the chosen purposes – whether they are good or not. It is a one way out aporia: τὰ πρὸς τὸ τέλος shall refers both to means and to essential ends, which still are not our simple and ultimate end. The latter is the standstill of an ethically oriented life and it is not meant to be decided or projected but rather to be recognized. Heidegger would not be far off from such an ethical realism, as authenticity is achieved by a reappropriation of one's own given essence. This being the case, φρόνησις would also be analogous to the Kantian notion of wisdom: namely, to a moral interpretation of the world resulting from "the idea of the necessary unity of all possible ends […] as a rule, the original and the at least limiting condition, for everything practical" (Kant 1998, 403). As wisdom perfects a twofold reason, it is said to possess a double character: "considered theoretically signifies cognition of the highest good and practically the fitness of the will for the highest good" (2015, 105). In order to comprehend the nature of wisdom, we need to consider how it relates to reason and to its ends as they shape a moral conception of the world (Ferrarin 2015, 90-104; La Rocca 2003, 217-42; Perulli 2017).

First to be noticed, wisdom is explicitly thematized in the *Canon of Pure Reason*, a section where the correct usage of reason is examined. Later on, in the 1798 *Anthropology* it is explicitly identified with "the idea of a practical use of reason that conforms perfectly with the law" (2006, 94). Given that reason is a normative faculty, whence we are required to derive

the determining motive of our will, then wisdom represents its perfected effectivity. On its practical side, wisdom requires us to realize the ultimate end of reason prescribed by the law: the highest good as the complete object of practical reason, which we are compelled to think as possible if moral law is not meant to be absurd. But the ontological facet of reason designates only a part of its activity. As we approach reason only from within its effects on our sensibility, normativity appears to us indeed as its leading part. Yet, reason in itself features a wider teleological structure: duties are not mere prohibitions, but they rather shape the autonomous path followed by a pure reason striving towards a positive good which is a mandatory end for us (Fugate 2014, 9-15; Cunico 2018, 118-23; 150-4; Camera 2017). From our perspective law is an objective principle or a prescriptive criterion to morally decide among subjective maxims, so that our natural and our intelligible ends are set in a correct harmony. The same does apply to *φρόνησις*, as it aims at developing our rational attitudes and to attune our irrational soul so that it comes to cooperate with the former. But there is more to wisdom, for on a theoretical ground it implies the cognition of the highest good:

> The moral law commands me to make the highest possible good in a world the final object of all my conduct. But I cannot hope to produce this except by the harmony of my will with that of a holy and beneficent author of the world; and although in the concept of the highest good, as that of a whole in which the greatest happiness is represented as connected in the most exact proportion with the greatest degree of moral perfection (possible in creatures), my own happiness is included, this is nevertheless not the determining ground of the will that is directed to promote the highest good; it is instead the moral law (which, on the contrary, limits by strict conditions my unbounded craving for happiness) (Kant 2005, 104).

Moral conscience signals the imperative command of reason, whose teleological interpretation configures the highest good as its object. If the highest good were not possible, then morality would command us to strive for something we cannot but fall short to realize: we would perceive it as absurd. For this reason, we must acknowledge the ontological conditions of its possibilities as moral postulates, provided that they are not declared impossible on a strictly theoretical basis. This negative

stance to the theoretical domain distinguishes the modern conception of wisdom from the ancient one, where wisdom meant "a direction to the concept in which the highest good was to be placed and to the conduct by which it was to be acquired" (ivi, 88).[12] Conversely, modern reason "strives to bring it to science". However, there is no scientific knowledge about the positive contents of wisdom, which are known only on a practical account: within a postulatory doctrine that demands a resolute faith capable of bridging the gap created by moral conscience, as it commands something that is not entirely within our power to achieve.

b. The shipwreck of morality: Heidegger's appropriation of practical reason

Wisdom implies a practical interpretation of the world, which is effective only through ethical effort to realize the highest good. In a 1795 essay Kant talks about a "heroic faith in virtue" (2001, 225; see Hill and Curteon 2018). As we have seen, virtue is a specific manifestation of fortitude concerning what opposes the moral disposition within us: it is moral fortitude, this being defined as "the capacity and considered resolve to withstand a strong but unjust opponent" (Kant 1991, 186). Elsewhere virtue is simply depicted as "the firm resolve to comply with one's duty" (2001, 91), which has become a stable attitude. Initially, we might think of the drives of sensibility as the aforementioned opponent. However, while immorality leans on the heteronomy of the sensible πάθη, evil does not spring from natural inclinations:

> For not only do these bear no direct relation to evil (they rather give the occasion for what the moral disposition can demonstrate in its power, for virtue): we also cannot presume ourselves responsible for their existence (we cannot because, as connatural to us, natural inclinations do not have us for their author), though we can well be responsible for the propensity to evil which, since it concerns the morality of the subject and hence is to be found in the latter as a free acting being, must be capable of being imputed to the subject as itself guilty of it (ivi, 81-2).

The enemy has less to do with a form of intemperance than with a feeble will, unready to believe in the effectiveness of what truly matters to it. Without this kind of resoluteness,

temperance would seem utterly pointless: why should we resist temptation, when our will is not strong enough to believe in its true self? But such a faith in virtue also requires entrusting the feasibility of the highest good as its wider horizon of sense, and here a problem arises. In the last two centuries, the consistency of the highest good has generally been denied, as its reality requires a moral author of the world considered at odds with autonomy. According to Hegel, moral conscience is hypocritical insofar as it pours the entire value of action into a constant strain toward a morality that cannot become effective and yet demands, in its favour, a retribution of happiness in accordance with virtue as its dignity. But such a retribution cannot be favourable to conscience except by grace, provided that the latter is structurally incapable of reaching its completion. Hence, within the doctrine of postulates, mere blessing is at stake (Hegel 2018, 348-65). Schopenhauer goes along this line, stating that the eudaemonism Kant "ejected through the front door of his system as heteronomous […] now creeps back in through the back door under the name: highest good" (2009, 128). Nietzsche draws the immediate consequences, as he witnesses the shipwreck of a morality, whose object now appears to be contradicted by the inner structure of the world. While we shall not take the onto-theological path to solve the aporia, the impact of negativity on *φρόνησις* as a moral interpretation of the world urges to be taken into account.

On the one hand, the deflation of values exacerbates the so-called *absurdum practicum* (Kant 2001, 415; 2015, 80).[13] Nietzsche traces the origin of the contemporary nihilism to the self-overcoming of morality: the process by which Christian morality triumphs over Christian God, "as the most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself the lie of faith in God" (2001, 219). Thus every moral perspective appears as vapid and historically conditioned, its value being confined to subjective evaluation: after all, no divine principle means no absolute good. On the other hand, this impasse provides a deeper insight on the meta-virtue of resoluteness. While it is not possible to delve into the deep dialogue with Nietzsche engaged by the professor of Meßkirch in the late thirties, suffice here to say that the former

believes the latter to be rights as he develops the aporias of the postulatory doctrine and to be wrong as he insists on interpretating the *noumenon* (Zali 2022a). Perhaps for this reason, the dialectic of the second *Critique* is never mentioned in a SS 1930 course dedicated to the question of human freedom within Kant. The analytic of practical reason is conversely given a substantial space as for the insight it provides on the phenomenon of volition, whose account clearly anticipates the existential analytic.[14] However, Kant is prevented from the access to a genuine understanding of the essence of human beings by a naturalistic comprehension of being. As a result, practical freedom is put in a spurious synthesis with a theoretical determination of reality as nature, whose obscure ground is located once again in an interpretative *πρᾶξις*.

> It remains true that Kant experienced, albeit the indicated limits, the specificity of will-governed actuality as a fact, and defined the problematic of practical reason from this experience. The factuality of the fact of pure practical reason is always and only given by us ourselves in our resolve to pure willing or against it […]. The pure willing is the *πρᾶξις* in and through which the fundamental law of pure practical reason has actuality (Heidegger 1994, 295; among the few interpreters who have devoted attention to this lecture-course, see Chiereghin 1985; Schalow 2002; Esposito 2004; Pietropaoli 2016).

Alongside with Aristotle, Kant plays an important role in the genesis of *Being and Time*. So does the *factum* of moral conscience, which notifies us of the unconditional imperative of our essence. *Φρόνησις* is the positive response to this *factum*, but paradoxically, on a theoretical ground, it reveals a negative content. Casted aside the postulates of practical reason as a spurious way to produce a synthetic unity between freedom and nature, only the mystery of a finite freedom remains. In other words, the phronetic spectrum is considerably reduced as we are left with the possibility of acting in accordance with our mysterious essence or living in a forgetful and passive state. Still, even if we refrain from casting the shadows of our interpretations in the tenebrous ocean of being within a theoretical ground, our practical stance betrays a fundamental decision (Zali 2022b). Resoluteness entails the belief on the consistency of a differential gaze on things. Were we to make our resolve, then we would put faith in something we consider

to be worth the risk. And the first object of such a resolute faith is this very faith itself.

4. Hermeneutics of resoluteness: a negative meta-virtue

The path we have followed may seem intricate. Its purpose is to reconstruct the genesis of resoluteness in *Being and Time*, as the possible core of a hermeneutical ethics capable of coping with the apparent absence of a major premise in the practical syllogism. The research is led in a dialogical context, which calls for a conciliation between two philosophers generally understood to radically diverge: Aristotle and Kant. This operation generates a series of issues, both at the terminological and at the conceptual level. For instance, there is a significant gap between Kant's conception of the eternity of the highest good and the temporality of resoluteness in Heidegger's sense. Nevertheless, this hermeneutical infidelity allows for the creation of a level of translatability where different conceptions of practical reasons can be compared with each other. What we acquire is a direct insight of *φρόνησις* as a paradigm for authentic existence, one that renders existence transparent to its very constitutive essence, thus enabling it to grasp its true nature. This transparency aligns with the Kantian notion of wisdom, since *Dasein* is a being-in-the-world and to be wise means to see the world in such a way that every situation is valued within the wider of its ultimately unveiled mystery. Furthermore, a firmnees in front of this abysmal enigma is required as the sole possibility left in contemporary nihilism. Beyond Heidegger, a resolute standing implicitly recognizes a vital concern to be at stake. Still, the problems of this solution are glaring enough and the testimony of another prominent student of Heidegger appoints them most clearly. I am referring to Leo Strauss, who, in a report over his scholar education, shows appreciation for the primacy that the professor of Meßkirch attributes to the things as we take care of them rather than as we perceive them. And yet, he then goes on to remark: What I could not stomach was his moral teaching, for despite his disclaimer he had such a teaching. The key term is "resoluteness", without any indication as to what are the

proper objects of resoluteness. There is a straight line which leads from Heidegger's resoluteness to his siding with the so-called Nazis in 1933 (1997, 461).[15]

The positive indication we thereby gain is that resoluteness is only a neutral and negative meta-virtue. It is a requirement of ethical life, not its fulfilment: as a matter of fact, one can be resolute in their desire to acquire power to the detriment of others, so that, if resoluteness were the sole criterion, then we would be compelled to accept such a behaviour as morally correct. Apart from our moral intuitions, we are clearly facing two phenomena which require to be differentiated. Accordingly, Aquinas states that "the praise of fortitude depends upon justice" (ST II-II, 123, 12). If fortitude were not oriented towards the good, it would deteriorate into mere grit (Campodonico 2018; Samek-Lodovici 2019). Moreover, the juxtaposition with the third cardinal virtue, justice, is not farfetched, since in both cases the ultimate challenge is death. Considering that bravery entails being able to endure injury, and that the deepest injury imaginable is death, Joseph Pieper asserts that:

> All fortitude stands in the presence of death. Fortitude is basically readiness to die or, more accurately, readiness to fall, to die, in battle. Thus every courageous action has as its deepest root the readiness to die […]. Fortitude that does not reach down into the depths of the willingness to die is spoiled at its root and devoid of effective power (2010, 117).

As we have seen, in the case of Heidegger, death is not only a natural event, but more importantly a psychical one. It means that every reassurance falls shorts, as we are prefigured the abysmal death of our spirit. Death is the coffer of nothing and nothing is the veil of the mystery surrounding our existence, which compels us to withhold our judgment on the inner meaning of our actions. Resoluteness undertakes even the risks of its spiritual death: that is, of the futility of what one strives for and of the possibility of its complete annihilation. Depending on the degree of this awareness, maintaining a "moral" perspective on the world can become increasingly challenging. And here lies the hermeneutic character of resoluteness: it involves striving for something we recognize as

an absolute good, to the extent that even self-sacrifice becomes a possibility, although this recognition is inevitably bound to remain an object of hope. This outcome leads to a re-evaluation of the highest good, necessitating a new understanding of its significance. The positive aim of *φρόνησις* and the reality of the highest good have yet to be fully explored. So, why should we persist with a moral perspective on the world? What are we truly seeking that informs our behaviour?

Pieper identifies three interconnected forms of fortitude – the pre-moral, the properly ethical and the mystical. All of them reflect a common theme: "man accepts insecurity; he surrenders confidently to the governance of higher powers; he risks is immediate well-being; he abandons the tense, egocentric hold of a timorous anxiety" (ivi, 138-9). And he acts in hope of victory, for the triumph of a higher love. This self-abandonment resonates with Heidegger's notion of releasement: the "availability before what-is which permits us simply to let things be in whatever may be their uncertainty and mystery" (Heidegger 2010, xi). But releasement emerges from an intense struggle (Dillard 2020, 1-16). It is in this struggle that it is determined whether every experience involves an indifferent quantitative difference in the increment of power or if our possibilities of action are situated within an axiological hierarchy of qualitative differences. If the former option holds true, conscience would be susceptible to a deconstruction, as its content would be absurd. Conversely, it would beckon us back to what truly matters, the reality of which needs to be explored if we are willing to imbue the major premise of the practical syllogism with positive content.

An ethics of hermeneutics demands more than just a theory of practical judgment to subsume the particular situation under a given rule. In fact, the rule is never preordained and requires an act of interpretation to be understood. However, this interpretative activity necessitates resoluteness as the strength of the will to uphold the highest good. Therefore, resoluteness emerges as a contender for the role of meta-virtue, that is, a virtue essential for all other virtues to follow – albeit in a negative sense. Conceding that every virtue relies on the guidance of prudence, interpretative

resoluteness is also indispensable as it determines whether we chose to trust or not the good that prudence identifies. Moreover, resoluteness places faith on itself so that it comes to be a recursive virtue. Its spiral structure offers a glimpse into the reality of the highest good, which must endure beyond mere psychical existence and prove itself worthy of sacrifice. In other words, resoluteness provides a formal indication on the positive content of φρόνησις, which blends the immanent logic of bare survival toward a spiritual order. On these bases, resoluteness emerges as a hermeneutic meta-virtue: it is the strength to perceive the specific ethical situation within a broader framework, and the firmness required to interpret the world in a manner which imbues it with a meaning that is hopefully not only bestowed, but also recognized.

NOTES

[1] But theory is described as a fashion of fallenness already in the outlines of a lecture on medieval mysticism programmed for the WS 1918/19 (Heidegger 1995c, 313-4). As for the retrieval of Kant against Husserl, see Heidegger 1995b, 431: "When some years ago I studied the *Critique of Pure Reason* anew and read it, as it were, against the background of Husserl's phenomenology, it opened my eyes; and Kant became for me a crucial confirmation of the accuracy of the path which I took in my search." On the hermeneutic turn of phenomenology, cf. Volpi (2007, 169 ff).

[2] For an overview on the genesis of hermeneutics out of phenomenology, see also Perego 1998.

[3] For example, see Heidegger 1976a, 398: "that term suggests a misinterpretation of the ontology of *Dasein* as if resoluteness were a special mode of behaviour of the practical faculty as opposed to the theoretical one. But, as concerning taking care of things, care includes the being of *Dasein* so primordially and completely that it must be already presupposed as a whole when we distinguish between theoretical and practical behaviour."

[4] Later in this work, however, the good is associated with beauty as a harmonic relationship between the parts of a whole. Gadamer quotes Phil. 64e: "the δύναμις of the good has taken refuge in the φύσις of the beautiful" (ivi, 115). On this topic, see Zali 2020, 190 ff., particularly in relation to a Heideggerian perspective. The connection between hermeneutics and ethics in Gadamer's thought is thoroughly examined by Camera 2001, 119–44; see especially p. 129, which includes an extensive bibliography on the subject.

[5] The passage from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that Arendt has in mind is §40, where Kant discusses the *sensus communis* as a principle of taste (2000,

175). Ferrarin 2004, 43–51 and Siani 2017, 21–35 offer insightful analyses of this theme.

[6] An analogue situation occurs in an Anglo-Saxon contest, where the classical particularistic reading supported by McDowell is now being criticized on the behalf of a renewed need of *φρόνησις*: that is, of an action-guiding theory (cf. Vaccarezza 2018; Kristjánsson 2022).

[7] The aforementioned article by Ferrarin (2004, 58, n. 30) includes a brief list of key authors associated with this movement, such as O'Neill, Höffe, Sherman, Korsgaard, and Herman.

[8] Consequently, the 'situational reading' proposed by Weidenfeld 2011 shall be rejected.

[9] Bernasconi 1990 suggests "circumspection" as a possible translation of *φρόνησις*, alongside "understanding", "conscience" and "resoluteness".

[10] It should be noted that this is a calque of Aristotle's expression: "τῷ αὐτῷ εἰδέναι" (NE VI, 1141b 33).

[11] According to Natali, the end is determined by a practical form of induction among accepted customs, namely *ἐθισμός* (cf. Aristotle 2018, 472, n. 214; see also Natali 1989, 103–142). On the longstanding question of means and ends within the deliberative process, see Irwin (1978).

[12] This is a rare instance in which Kant presents his moral doctrine as continuous with a proposal from the past, as underlined by Engstrom 1997.

[13] To the best of my knowledge, the theme of *absurdum practicum* has received little attention from scholars. On this topic, see Wood (1970, 248); see also Pelegrín (2016).

[14] In the preparatory sketches for a later seminary course, the highest good is dedicated only three brief paragraphs, without any significant interpretative stance (cf. *Seminare: Kant – Leibniz – Schiller,* GA 84), 258; 325-327). Few more things are said about it in a section dedicated to the postulates, where the highest good grants an enlarged comprehension of "the finite rational practical being in its contemporary relationship toward being in its entirety" (ivi, p. 254).

[15] Strauss 2006, 128 directs a similar criticism towards Ernst Jünger's concept of courage. I do not endorse the view of resoluteness as a form of 'decisionism' that can be used as a conviction at the expense of others. Resoluteness also involves an openness that can respond to the other and invite a reciprocal acknowledgment of the other's freedom. What I wish to emphasize is that, when considered in isolation, resoluteness fails to justify this positive outcome and remains susceptible to a negative one.

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Martin Buber and Henri Maldiney on the Notion of Event

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Abstract

This paper investigates the thematization of the event from two different, yet related approaches. First, I will analyze Martin Buber's notion of the relational event, following its manifold usage in his writings. Buber's perspective will help in emphasizing the relational character of the event, which happens between I and Thou. Secondly, I will interrogate Henri Maldiney's concept of the event, in relation to what he has called transpassibility (transpassibilité), namely our radical openness towards the event. Transpassibility will be analyzed alongside the notion of trust, and I will attempt to prove that this radical openness to the event will be the key element that allows the human being to resist and cope with it. My claim is that the perspectives of both Buber and Maldiney can be taken in conjunction and provide a unitary whole regarding the process of attuning to the world. Buber stressed the importance of genuine encounters in the life of the person, while Maldiney addressed the problem of rhythm, regarding our relationship with the world. An adjacent aim of my paper will be that of showing how the conceptualizations of the two authors can lead us to a different approach concerning the psychotherapeutic relationship, hence I will also venture into the paths that Martin Buber and Henri Maldiney opened towards a dialogical psychotherapy. Nevertheless, both authors acknowledged the importance of trust in the world and its distinctive function, which allows the person to cope with the traumatic event. Finally, my paper will test the limits of the possibility of comparing Buber's philosophy of dialogue and Maldiney's phenomenological stance towards events.

Keywords: Martin Buber, Henri Maldiney, phenomenology, event, trust, rhythm, openness, receptivity, responsivity, psychotherapy

Introduction

Neither Martin Buber (1878-1965), nor Henri Maldiney (1912-2013) were trained in psychiatry, yet their works bear a certain importance and impact on the issue of human suffering.

Both knew Ludwig Binswanger, the phenomenological psychiatrist, and corresponded with him (Agassi 1999, 184). Unfortunately, Buber's interest in psychiatry started late, and here we could remember his attempt to elaborate a philosophical anthropology, which could have been used also by therapists. In this sense, his lectures delivered at the *Washington School of Psychiatry* in the *United States of America,* alongside his collaborators Maurice Friedman and Leslie Farber, become very telling. At their invitation and initiative, Buber discussed the issues of guilt, the notion of the interhuman field, but also his concept of the unconscious. On the other hand, after a period dedicated to the interpretation of works of art in light of the phenomenological approach (Maldiney 2003a, 33), Maldiney started stressing the relationship between man and madness. His main sources of inspiration were the abovementioned Ludwig Binswanger, but also the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. While Maldiney has drawn explicitly on the works of several psychiatrists such as Viktor von Weizsäcker, Leopold Szondi and Erwin Straus, in an original attempt to think the relation between the human being and mental illness, Buber has drawn inspiration from the fragments of Heraclitus, and tried to apply his thoughts concerning the philosophy of dialogue to the framework of psychotherapy. Buber was also a critique of psychoanalysis, especially of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, whereas Maldiney was sympathetic towards certain psychoanalytical theories, especially of the notions of introjection and projection.

This paper attempts to give an original interpretation and understanding of the concept of event, in light of the philosophies of Martin Buber and Henri Maldiney. Even though recent contributions in the philosophy of the event have been made (Marquet 1995; Romano 2009, 2014; Raffoul 2020; Prasek 2021a, 2021b) the conjunction between Buber's perspective on this issue and that of Maldiney was not underlined as such. The main theme which will guide our analysis consists in the way the philosophies of both authors provide a response to the notion of the event, thus allowing one to develop certain therapeutic consequences vis-à-vis the event. Our novelty might

consist in the way we highlight the relational character of the (traumatic) event, and the way we interrogate the relationship between the notion of transpassibility (being receptive towards the event) and trust.

Therefore, our paper will be divided into three sections. The first one will investigate Martin Buber's notion of the relational event, connecting it with his concept of the encounter in the case of the I-Thou relationship, but also with his notion of trust. In the second division of the paper, I will venture into Henri Maldiney's theory of madness, by investigating his notion of the event, its relation to the two main notions of his late philosophy, namely the couple transpassibility-transpossibility (*transpassibilité-transpossibilité*), and finally, his account of trust, or original faith, which he borrows from Husserl's concept of *Urdoxa*. The final section will be dedicated to the conjunction of the two authors' works, and their perspectives will be applied onto certain psychotherapeutic principles. Henceforth, I will be trying to suggest that the theories of both Buber and Maldiney have therapeutical implications, and if their theories were to be treated in conjunction, they might help the human being cope with suffering in the case of the psychotherapeutic encounter. While Maldiney was trying to solve the problem concerning the way in which Dasein might go insane, Buber was very careful in providing an account of the dialogical psychotherapist who has to be open and confirm the other, and most importantly, not to label the patient. Otherwise, the "moment of surprise" will not spring between patient and therapist. Likewise for the event, the "moment of surprise" might bear certain positive or negative features or effects. The moment of the surprise might even trigger a certain modification of our being-in-the-world, and the outcome of this modification depends upon our trust in the world and our rhythmical relatedness towards it.

1. The relational event

In his first major contribution to philosophy, namely the book *I and Thou,* Buber was thematizing the relational event between I and Thou as one which does not last that long, but which can nonetheless have a major impact on both the I and the Thou. In order to understand what Martin Buber was

proposing with his notion of the relational event, we first have to explain what he means by the genuine I-Thou encounter.

Already from the very first words of the book *I and Thou,* we discover that the human being's attitude towards the world is twofold, according to the fundamental word-pair which he or she uses in addressing the world. Thus, by virtue of the fundamental word-pair, which is addressed, the human being can enter either into an I-Thou relation, or into an I-It relation. (Buber 2013, 3) The I-Thou relation has to be first and foremost defined by mutuality, while the I-It relation is defined by experience and use. (Buber 2013, 6)

We will soon be informed that not only do the I-Thou relations apply to the interhuman realm, but rather, we can enter into an I-Thou relation even with the being of a tree, or even with a work of art. Buber's discussion of the work of art becomes very telling for our phenomenology of the encounter. Concerning the work of art, Buber argues that the artistic act consists in both a sacrifice and a risk, which also applies to the I-Thou relation between persons. (Buber 2013, 8) The sacrifice and the risk might also refer to the nature of the encounter itself, namely an encounter between two human beings, in which the spontaneity of the I and the spontaneity of the Thou come into contact. We are closely approaching the notion of the event, because as we will soon find out, the event reconfigures dramatically our projected possibilities towards the world. In this manner, Claude Romano's definition of the event becomes paramount for our analysis. Thus, he writes that the event reconfigures the essential possibilities of the human being (what he calls the *advenant,* i.e. the happening subject), but also his or her world, by bringing along a new understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves. (Romano 2009, 58) More precisely, the event brings along with itself a transformation of our being-in-the-world which involves a certain risk. (Romano 2009, 60) We can already notice how Buber's idea of the risk involved in the relational event anticipates Romano's thematization.

Buber considers that the Thou meets me through grace, and not by seeking. Therefore, anticipating Maldiney, we can already notice how the encounter is made possible by the

critical instant (Kairos). Maldiney himself continued the philosophical tradition which started from Plato, in speaking of the *Kairos,* the moment of opportunity and (decisive) action, which should be clearly differentiated from the notion of *Chronos* or briefly put, the passage of time. The Thou meets me, as Buber argues, and the relation means choosing and being chosen, suffering and acting. Moreover, Buber holds that this (inter)action should be carried out with our whole being. As he will develop his idea further in the case of his philosophical anthropology, when shaking hands, for example, we are not merely there either with body or psyche, but rather, with our whole being. (Agassi 1999, 241) The I becomes I by saying Thou, and all real living is meeting. (Buber 2013, 9) This effectiveness of the I-Thou encounter might prove decisive even from our being-in-the-world, because encountering the Thou, something is radically change in the being of the I. That would be Martin Buber's relational event. When I meets the Thou, all of the possibilities pertaining to the I are changed, reoriented and reconfigured in order to actually meet the other, and be responsible towards him/her. It is not the case that the world of It becomes insignificant when I encounter the Thou, but rather, the world of It comes to shine in light of the genuine I-Thou encounter. Therefore, there is an ontological distinction between the world of the It and that of the Thou, as Buber puts it. (Agassi 1999, 204)

In his commentary on Buber's philosophy and concerning the impact which his thought had on psychotherapy, Giovanni Stanghellini recalls the next passage which we are going to analyze. In this passage, Stanghellini observes a genuine phenomenological reduction of Buber's, concerning the dialogical life of the human being. (Stanghellini 2017, 11) We might add that this quote is very telling in its ethical implications. Thus, as Buber puts it:

> "The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between I and Thou." (Buber 2013, 9)

Therefore, as Stanghellini correctly notices, Buber insists that we should meet the other in his/her radical alterity or otherness. Moreover, Buber's phenomenological or dialogical

reduction also involves the subject's ethical position, because it means letting the other be, as in Heidegger's *Sein-Lassen.* (Heidegger 2001, 224) Nonetheless, it is also an effort coming from the part of the I, namely that of withholding any foreknowledge which might impede the genuine encounter between I and Thou. Buber will expand on this phenomenological reduction and as we are going to see he will apply this principle when he will be talking about the therapist's relation to his/her client.

"No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou." (Buber 2013, 9) These would be for Buber the essential preconditions of the genuine encounter. We must nonetheless remember the two key elements for further discussion, namely the letting-be of the other, and the phenomenological-dialogical reduction. These two components will prove themselves very useful when we are going to inquire into Buber's stance towards the psychotherapeutic relation.

Furthermore, Buber argues that the presence of the other gives rise to the authentic present (Buber 2013, 9), namely what we have called, following Maldiney, the critical instant. The relational event is deeply bound to the *Kairotic* instant, because it involves the unforeseen, and here we can remember the sacrifice and the risk involved in entering into the I-Thou relation. Nevertheless, as we have stated above, the instant is one of opportunity and of action, namely of decision. From this brief statement, we can deduce that the relational event demands participation from both I and Thou. Later, when we will discuss Maldiney's theory, we will find out that this participation is made possible by the radical openness towards the event, and the receptivity related to it, namely through transpassibility.

Maldiney is once again echoed by Buber's statements, namely when the latter suggests that true beings are lived in the present and object in the past. (Buber 2013, 10) This would be exactly Maldiney's difference between presence and representation, the first one being related to the present, and the second to the past. Buber discusses mutuality and reciprocity further and arrives at the conclusion that the Thou affects the I inasmuch the I affects the Thou. (Buber 2013, 12)

This mutual affection involves contact, which becomes for Buber the presupposition of trust. Let us now inquire into Buber's conception of trust.

In his book on faith, Buber argues that the human being has faith, or trust, in the other, without having sufficient conditions of explaining why he or she does so. The human being just trusts, naturally, thus we can draw the conclusion that trust is phenomenologically basic, as the Dutch philosopher Stephen Strasser puts it. (Strasser 1969, 127) Buber's equation is not so simple at all, because he insists that this sort of basic trust depends upon the contact between two beings in their wholeness. (Buber 1951, 8) Therefore, we could remember Buber's discussions from *I and Thou* about the dialogical life of the infant, in which the philosopher of dialogue argued that by virtue of his or her inborn Thou (Buber 2013, 19), the infant seeks human contact from the very beginning of his or her life. This contact is accomplished in the relation of tenderness between him/her and his/her mother. Buber here resonates with certain psychoanalytical approaches, such as those of Frances Tustin or Erik Erikson. In the case of these theories, the psychoanalytical authors argued that the feeling of basic trust of safety is guaranteed by the presence of the mother (Erikson 1995, 222) or even by the rhythmical interactions (Tustin 1986, 268) of the infant with the mother. Buber's theory becomes even more original because he states that this contact has to take place between two non-divided existences, namely, when contact takes place, we have to participate with our entire being, not solely psychically or physically. Moreover, Buber's thesis even resembles Wittgenstein's observations from the book *On Certainty,* a book in which Wittgenstein argues that trust is basic, and it is the presupposition of the interactive relationships in the case of the language-games which take place between children and parents. (Wittgenstein 1969, 23)

2. Receptivity and responsivity

In Buber's thematization of the human being's twofold attitude towards the world we found out the relational aspect of the event and the implications of the genuine I-Thou encounter

for restructuring our stance and even our possibilities towards the world. On the other hand, following Maldiney, we are going to insist upon the two components which render possible the "experience" of the event, namely its undergoing. These two elements are the radical receptivity and openness on the one hand, and the active and creative responsive aspect on the other.

From the beginning of his text, wherein he explains his core concepts pertaining to phenomenological psychiatry, Maldiney insists that transpassibility (transpassibilité) and transpossibility (transpossibilité) are two modes of existing in transcendence. (Maldiney 1991, 361) Before we are going to give a definition to either transpassibility or transpossibility, and correlate or differentiate them with one another, we ought to come back to Maldiney's understanding of the event. The event becomes thus the building block of Maldiney's entire theory of human suffering. Therefore, we should inquire into the nature of the traumatic event vis-à-vis Dasein and explain why it makes the original faith (Urdoxa) shake or collapse. We will soon notice that transpassiblity is the capacity to undergo such a radical change in Dasein's being-in-the-world, while transpossibility would be the creative response given by Dasein to that event. One could already notice how the undergoing of the event presents a sort of dialogical structure, namely an address and a response. Maldiney is very clear when he holds that his analysis will start from Heidegger's fundamental ontology, in which the latter employed the notion of Dasein to explain the human being's sojourn in the world. Therefore, even though he uses certain concepts which he borrows from Husserl, he will leave aside the notions of subject or ego, and their transcendental forms. Although Husserl seems to be sometimes neglected throughout Maldiney's analysis of human suffering, the French phenomenologist nonetheless employs Husserl's notion of *Urdoxa* several times. Likewise, for Maldiney, Husserl's *Urdoxa* represents the original faith in the world, which is prior to the various sorts of belief modalities, such as doubt. (Husserl 1983, 252-253)

Maldiney states boldly that if the event and psychosis coexist or exclude each other, either way, the equation makes sense. Psychosis for Maldiney is a metamorphosis of our

existence as being-in-the-world, wherein the existential moment (Kairos) proves itself to be decisive. The event is for Maldiney something sudden, which is disconcerting for the human being. Due to the event, the course of the development of our lives is suddenly interrupted. (Maldiney 1991, 251) Thus, the event brings with itself a novel situation, which demands a response from us. The event also provokes a constitutive transformation of Dasein's being-in-the-world. (Maldiney 1991, 252) This sudden feature of the disconcerting event was also present in the works of Søren Kierkegaard, especially in *The Concept of Anxiety,* wherein the Danish philosopher explained the relationship between the instant and anxiety. (Kierkegaard 1980, 88)

Returning to Maldiney, one ought to draw the conclusion that the event in not only a sudden interruption of our being-in-the-world, but it is also related to our historicity. In light of this claim, Maldiney suggests that the event and the internal history of one's life are unrepeatable. Their encounter, which is unique, also represents the genesis of the present. The event is therefore a rupture, which takes place in the instant. (Maldiney 1991, 257-258)

Maldiney further distinguishes between the immanent time of experience and the transcendent time of experience. The transcendent time can be connected with Dasein's Umwelt and with the being ready at hand (Heidegger 1996, 97), while the immanent time is that of the development of the personality. The transcendent time passes, while the immanent one progresses. (Maldiney 1991, 261) But how are these two types of temporalities related to the question of the event? The event becomes now exactly the missing link between these two types of temporalities. As Maldiney suggests, the event involves the vital functions at a moment pertaining to transcendent time, yet it involves also our subjective affections of our internal life history. (Maldiney 1991, 263)

The French phenomenologist recalls Heidegger's thematization of being-in-the-world, insisting that Dasein and the world are not in a relation of opposition, rather in one of connection. (Heidegger 1996, 49) Moreover, the separation of

the event from meaning is as artificial as that of experience and meaning. (Maldiney 1991, 265)

Our anchoring is the world is provided by the original faith (Urdoxa), which becomes menaced by the upbringing of the event. As we were attempting to prove beforehand, the event does not alter Dasein's horizon of being-in-the-world, but rather it alters the ground of it. Consequently, connecting these two statements expressed above, the suddenness of the disconcerting event provokes a metamorphosis of our being-in-the-world concerning its ground. This is due to the failure of our anchoring in the world, of the original faith (Urdoxa). (Maldiney 1991, 272) As Maldiney emphasized several times, the disconcerting event represents a change of our being-in-the-world and of its openness. (Maldiney 1991, 273) The event becomes thereof an existential, in the Heideggerian meaning of the word. (Maldiney 1991, 294) Anticipating, the event is also connected to our rhythmical becoming in the world, as Samuel Thoma puts it. Rhythm would be the response to the event, namely to the encounter with and unprecedented strangeness which addresses us. (Thoma 2019, 283)

We will now briefly inquire into Maldiney's account of the dynamics of rhythm, so that we can set up some key aspects concerning one of the most important of his concepts, which is also related to the issue of the event. The therapeutical implications of rhythm will be left aside for the last part of our paper, in which we are going to suggest a possible conjunction between the ways in which the theories of Buber and Maldiney could be applied to the therapeutical set-up, bearing always in mind the notion of event. In his *Aesthetics of Rhythm,* Maldiney suggests that rhythm is the direct response to the experience of the abyss. The cosmogenic moment would be that in which a point is set up again chaos, which happens by virtue of rhythm. As the current exegesis suggests (Murakami 2021, 102-103), rhythm establish the "here" and the "there", in the phenomenological sense of the terms. Moreover, Marc Richir would stress the importance of the rhythmical exchange of regards between mother and infant. Thanks to this rhythmical exchange of regards, the mother fixes the infant's gaze, setting up an absolute "here" and an absolute "there". Marc Richir even

insists that this exchange involves the notion of the sublime, but we will not carry out the entire analysis here, rather we will leave it aside for further research. (Richir 2008, 84-85) Returning to Maldiney, rhythm establishes a sort of existential communication between self and world. (Maldiney 2012, 206-207) Rhythm could be also considered Maldiney's reconfiguration of Bergson's notion of the tensions of duration. Moreover, Maldiney would discuss even different types of tensions of duration, under the heading of creative and destructive ones. We could just consider the different ways of approaching the world, therefore, there would be creative acts and destructive ones, each of them bearing their own tension of duration. A comparison between the creative and destructive tensions of duration and Buber's notion of the mundane creation (synthesis) and destruction (analysis) would exceed the thematic and methodological limits of our paper.

Maldiney is very attentive in connecting rhythm with the critical instant (Maldiney 2012, 222), thus our rhythmical response towards the world, would be also a response towards the critical instant of choice and decision. In his paper on Maldiney's key philosophical concepts, Samuel Thoma provides multiple remarks concerning the elements which make up Maldiney's conception of human nature. For example, Thoma states that rhythm structures and stabilizes our communication with the world. Nonetheless, rhythm must not be mistaken for the various bodily rhythms, but rather, rhythm has to be conceived in relation to our being-in-the-world. Thus, it becomes a rhythm of existence. (Thoma 2019, 282)

Now that we have gathered all the key elements which form Maldiney's thematization of phenomenological psychiatry, we are going to finally give two short definitions to the notions of transpassibility and transpossibility. Following Samuel Thoma's paper wherein he provides a synthetic, yet original account of Maldiney's perspective on human nature, we could suggest that transpassibility refers to our capacity of undergoing a radical change in our being, due to the intervention of the event. Therefore, we are passible of encountering something which transcends our prior horizons of experiences and expectations. On the other hand,

transpossibility means the capacity to respond actively and creatively to the event which marks a breach into our existence. As for genuine decisions, this response has to be given with our entire being. This means that our response is not either a solely psychical one or a corporeal one, rather it involves our human wholeness. This would be the definition of authenticity for Maldiney. (Thoma 2019, 284)

3. Psychotherapeutic implications

We are now going to sum up all the abovementioned key aspects in order to present the possible conjunction between the perspectives of Buber and of Maldiney towards psychotherapy. Therefore, we will soon find out that there are ways to cope with the effects of the event, in the case of the therapeutic encounter. While Buber pointed out that there is not such a thing as a soul being sick alone (Buber 1965, 47), Maldiney stressed the importance of the encounter for what he designed under the heading of the "moment of reality". (Maldiney 2003b, 21) From these two statements, we could already argue in favor of a relational and dialogical model of therapeutic intervention. The accounts of Buber and Maldiney concerning the human being even seem to complement each other, because while the latter discusses the ways in which Dasein could go insane, the former provides several valuable insights concerning the therapeutic process of alleviating this sort of human suffering.

Buber's stance towards psychotherapy is most evident in his later writings concerning the issue of the interhuman realm. Buber clearly distinguishes the interhuman from the social. If in the latter we mostly speak about hierarchies, or even about social institutions and structures, in the former the key element which defines this interhuman field is the real encounter which takes place in the case of the face-to-face situation between I and Thou. The unfolding of the interhuman is called the dialogical. (Buber 1965, 75) If the interhuman were to take place, "being" has to take the place of "seeming", namely we should leave aside all the social masks, and be authentic. (Buber 1965, 75-76)

We should also recall Buber's discussion of his notion of distance. By this very event, the person sets a being at a

distance, entering into a relation with it, as a contrasting and independent opposite. (Buber 1965, 60) Nonetheless, we should remember that this primal setting at a distance does not occur only to other human beings, but also to the realm of art. As Buber puts it:

> "Art is neither the impression of natural objectivity nor the expression of spiritual subjectivity, but it is the work and witness of the relation between the *substantia humana* and the *substantia rerum,* it is the realm of the between which has become a form." (Buber 1965, 66)

Returning to our discussion of distance and relation, by virtue of the former, the human being sets another human being at a distance, thus entering into relation with him/her. Only by the event of distancing can the human being really make the other present and "imagine the real". The making present is the presupposition of "imagining the real". The first means that the other is recognized and acknowledged as an autonomous being before me, as an independent opposite. The latter is the capacity of feeling what the other wishes, desires and needs at a certain moment. This process is not mere empathy, because imagining the real demands of us to remain at a distance and respect everything that happens in between us. If empathy or sympathy was thematized in Buber's times as a capacity to penetrate the being of the other as a sort of mentalization, the philosopher of dialogue holds that imagining the real is the work of the in-between, which is made possible by the primal setting at a distance. These capacities of making present and of imagining the real become so intense, that we even feel the other's pain, for example, in our bodies. Thus, Buber concludes, I and Thou live a shared situation. (Buber 1965, 70) The event of confirmation becomes then possible. By confirmation Buber means a sort of acknowledging of the other's dynamic becoming, alongside his/her unfolding potentialities.

Besides giving a speculative account of the unconscious, Martin Buber provides in his seminar held at the *Washington School of Psychiatry* several remarks concerning human suffering and how can the psychotherapist alleviate this pain. Consequently, Buber argues that if real meeting between I and

Thou has to take place, then the therapist must bracket the ready-made categories of his school of thought, in order to actually meet the patient in his uniqueness. (Buber 1999, 167) Buber values the importance of the "moment of the surprise" between therapist and patient. In order for this critical moment to spring, this sort of dialogical bracketing needs to take place. In other words, the therapist must withhold his ready-made categories of interpretation of the patient's material and wait to see what happens. This was called by Martin Buber the "conscious liberating" of the patient, from the therapist's "unconscious imposition". (Buber 1999, 164) What exactly is at stake for Buber in not the specific method, whereas without the method the therapist would be a dilletante, but rather the actual person of the therapist. In other words, the therapist must take into consideration the unforeseeable, the unexpected, which was called by child psychologist Daniel Stern the "moments of meeting". (Stern 2004, 23) These moments provide rich insights into the therapeutic process, by allowing both I and Thou to experience the other side of the relation, and by deepening the interhuman field. Nonetheless, Buber once again put great emphasis on existential trust. Buber even offers a paramount situation, namely one in which the patient puts his entire faith in the being of the therapist, thus the responsibility of the therapist becomes even more demanding. Nevertheless, cooperation is again a term employed by Buber in order to reveal the shared responsibility which needs to take place in the psychotherapeutic set-up.

On the other hand, Maldiney's scattered remarks on the therapeutical process, and his insights into human suffering seem to resonate with Buber's overall thematization of human encounters. Both acknowledge the way in which the event (the critical instant) brings a radical change into the beings of those who encounter each other, and moreover, both suggest that trust is the key element which renders possible coping with the excess of sense and affectivity provided by the relational event. In his synthetic paper on Maldiney's key concepts, Samuel Thoma provides a chapter wherein he discusses the therapeutic implications of Maldiney's overall work. Therefore, the former suggests that Maldiney defines psychosis as a loss of openness

in the face of the event and a preponderance of the cognitive and reflective aspects of the human being. Comparing once again the thematization of Buber and Mladiney, while for the first the I-Thou relation opened the present and the I-It relation pertained to the past, for the latter, human suffering and even psychosis were exactly the passage from presence to representation. Returning to Thoma's paper, and following Maldiney, the former suggests that therapy's principal aim would be that of integrating the event in the patient's rhythmical becoming. This happens by virtue of staying open to the event, both in a receptive and a responsive manner. The radical openness towards the world and the event (which opens the world), is called by Thoma the new and unprecedented alterity. For Maldiney, our receptivity and responsiveness are situated at the sensing bodily level of existence. This statement reminds us of Buber's notion of the unconscious, which could have been as well rendered as a sort of bodily presence. Therefore, the genuine encounter between patient and therapist would be, as Buber considered, one between two non-divided existences. Moreover, the therapist should help the therapist integrate the event in his or her rhythmical becoming, in this sense, art therapy becomes here a key tool for this process to unfold. Thoma recalls Hölderlin's saying that we should come and meet into the Open as an imperative of the therapeutic process, in which both therapist and patient share a unique cooperation. Maldiney's understanding of the therapeutic process becomes evident, and similar to Buber's at the moment when Thoma suggests that the therapist should leave aside his or her professional standpoint and empathize with the patient's world. These processes were named by Buber the "conscious liberating" from the "unconscious imposition" and "imagining the real". Thoma is most clear when he asserts that openness is a shared process. (Thoma 2019, 289)

We should come for a moment back to the issues of surprise and of the unforeseen, comparing it with Maldiney's receptive and responsive stances towards the event. As Thoma puts it, in terms of receptivity, openness implies that the therapist must be ready to be surprised by the patient's

experiences. This also involves letting them speak for themselves and appear as they are, thus not categorizing or typifying (labelling) them. Responsivity is thus as important as receptivity, because if there were not any responsivity from the part of the therapist, the therapeutic process would become a solitary monologue. Being open means actively and creatively respond to what the one who suffers presents in the therapeutic set-up. If this elementary responsiveness to the event would not function as such, there would be no dialogue between I and Thou. Authenticity is the key term employed by Thoma. (Thoma 2019, 190) Unpredictability becomes the key element with which the therapist must accommodate to. Therefore, the therapist has to let all the masks down (the persona), and be who he or she really is, in order that he or she might encounter the patient's actual needs. Henceforth, a re-attunement due to rhythm takes place not only between self and world, but also between I and Thou. (Thoma 2019, 291)

Finally, concerning the problem of the loss of trust in the world, which is shaken by the traumatic event, both Buber and Maldiney provide rich insight into the nature and genesis of this original faith towards the world and others. Nonetheless, trust in the world could be regained, in the case of the therapeutic set-up, by virtue of the rhythmical interactions between patient and therapist, namely by remaining into the Open, and being receptive and offering a creative response towards the situation in which they find themselves. Paraphrasing Buber, trust in the world would not be only the greatest achievement of education, but also the greatest achievement of psychotherapy. (Buber 2002, 116)

For example, in their paper on the transcendental history of trust, Fazakas and Gozé argued that basic trust, which is built up by the to-and-fro movement of introjection and projection of what is internal, respectively external, renders possible the way in which the human being can live in the world, without a fear of being menaced by something indeterminate. Moreover, this sort of basic trust makes the world feel hospitable and render possible human encounters. Now it becomes more evident why both Buber and Maldiney stressed the notion of trust on several occasions throughout

their works. Likewise, Buber, for Fazakas and Gozé, the basic trust is configured by the contact between two non-divided human existences, namely by the repeated interactive patterns of mother and infant, especially in the case of holding behaviors. (Fazakas & Gozé 2020, 185) While Buber spoke quite generally about the event of contact, Fazakas and Gozé clearly distinguished the multiple architectonical strata throughout which the infant has to pass in order to gain this basic trust in the world and in others. Therefore, Fazakas and Gozé draw on Marc Richir's theory of the process of humanization, arguing that the maternal holding is introjected in the guise of the transcendental soil, which enables the infant to project this basic feeling of security onto the external world. This would be the alternative phenomenological account of Buber's notion of the event of contact, or of Maldiney's appropriation of the Husserlian *Urdoxa*.

Conclusion

Concluding, in this paper we have ventured into the specific dynamics of the event and tried to delineate its consequences for a possible dialogical stance towards psychotherapy. We have drawn mostly on Buber and Maldiney and noticed how their conceptions of the event bear certain resemblances. In the case of Buber, we have explained how the relational event functions, namely we have inquired in the specific mode of the I-Thou relation and followed its direct consequences. The relational event was for Buber that specific sort of encounter which reconfigures our being-in-the-world, by readjusting our possibilities towards the world. More precisely, the I-Thou encounter opens the realm of responsibility towards the other. Being responsive meant for Buber listening to the fact of being addressed and responding with our whole being. Henceforth, we have clearly delimited the effects which the I-Thou relational event bears on the human being from the realm of experience and use which pertained to the realm of the I-It relation. Already when analyzing the I-Thou encounter, we have given some hints concerning Buber's stance towards psychotherapy, namely at the moment when we discussed the phenomenological or

dialogical reduction implied in Stanghellini's reading of Buber's *I and Thou*. Next, Maldiney's concept of the event is very rich in content, because it allows one to explain the certain dynamics of our being-in-the-world, especially the case in which Dasein's sanity is at stake. More precisely, this means that the event might be responsible for Dasein going insane, because as we have described, the event is first and foremost a happening which reconfigures our being-in-the-world and readjusts our possibilities. The event could be either have positive consequences or not. If the event is a traumatic one, namely a happening which exceeds Dasein's grasp of affectivity at a specific moment, then Dasein becomes disconcerted, due to this sudden change. Marc Richir's theory of the positive and negative versions of the sublime was not the aim of this paper, but nonetheless, the theory of the Belgian phenomenologist could be of interest for further research. (Richir 2015, 217-218) Returning to the positive and negative events, whereas we labelled trauma as a negative event, the positive event could be exactly the "moment of the surprise", namely a surprise which allows the human being to develop further and reorient his or her possibilities towards the world. We have given a hint at this moment of the surprise, when discussing Buber's event of confirmation. Finally, we have stressed the possible therapeutic implications of both Buber and Maldiney's philosophies, in order to show how these two different, yet very related conceptions of the world, could throw light on the issue of the encounter with the event. Therefore, from Buber we have taken his account of the dialogical therapist, and concerning Maldiney, we have followed Samuel Thoma's synthetic, yet original development of Maldiney's phenomenological psychiatry in light of current research in the field of dialogic psychotherapy. Nevertheless, both Buber and Maldiney discussed the ways in which the event is related to the encounter. This possible conjunction could be also left for further investigations, because in the present paper, we have only given hints towards the relation between the event as a happening and the encounter as a way of being-in-the-world.

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[All paraphrases in the text, from French to English, are mine].

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The Digital Transformation of the Democratic Public Sphere: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The liberal democratic regimes rest on a well-developed public sphere accessible to all citizens which favors free discussions based on reason and critical debate and serves as a space where public opinion is formed through reasoned dialogue. The new digital technologies disrupted many parts of contemporary democratic societies and transformed their public sphere. Digital transformation alters industries and markets, changing the perceived subjective value, satisfaction, and usefulness of goods or services and displacing established companies and products. Within the political realm, digital transformation creates a fracture between the vulnerable populations who are ill-informed and lack digital fluency and politicians who tend to learn about peoples' problems not to deal with them but to weaponize new technologies to engineer elections and win power. The rise of misinformation and disinformation undermines public trust in democratic institutions and discourages or incapacitates citizens from engaging in debates within the public sphere. On the other hand, the digital transformation of the public sphere empowers ordinary people to aggregate in various publics and counteract the domination of the mainstream parties. Our paper aims to answer whether new technologies provide citizens with ways to counter the undemocratic tendencies caused by digital transformation and engage actively in the public sphere.

Keywords: democratic public sphere, liberal democracy, digital transformation, social media, public reason

Introduction

Any society has a form of political organization and a corresponding public sphere. As an agency that transforms human collectivity into a politically constituted society, the state exerts the monopoly of legitimate coercion to ensure the

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well-being and stability of its society by providing governance, security, and public services on a geographically bounded territory (Bremer and Ghosn 2003, 22). The public sphere is "the arena where citizens come together, exchange opinions regarding public affairs, discuss, deliberate, and eventually form public opinion" (The World Bank 2009, 2) that emerges between private households and the state (Habermas 1991, 30; World Bank 2009, 2). It is generally accepted that a state organized as a liberal democracy relies on a well-developed democratic public sphere accessible to all citizens. Such a public sphere encourages free discussions based on reason and critical debate. It serves as a space where public opinion is shaped through open, rational, and inclusive dialogue, even when divergent interests drive citizens. To the extent that people are involved in the public sphere, they are empowered to hold government officials accountable for their actions and influence their political decisions.

Both states and the public sphere of various societies have changed significantly throughout history. Still, they did not follow a linear trajectory from inferior to superior or bad to good. Of course, one can argue that contemporary liberal democratic regimes provide more economic advantages to the multitude than the absolutist monarchies of the 17th and 18th centuries or that "contemporary media-constituted public sphere" (Trenz and Eder 2004, 10) involves more citizens in debating and solving public problems than the late 17th and early 18th centuries coffeehouses (England), salons (France), table societies (Germany), and the New England town meeting in pre-Independence America (Odugbemi 2008, 27; The World Bank 2009, 1-2). However, no historical law determines the evolution of states and the public sphere toward a worthwhile end by undergoing a series of incremental or revolutionary improvements. Besides, all positive and negative transformations exceeded in magnitude and complexity the intentions of those who premeditated or triggered them. Humanity has not reached the "end of history" in terms of ideological evolution, as Francis Fukuyama (1992) posited. Despite its superior ethical, political, and economic traits compared to other political regimes, Western liberal democracy

does not represent the final form of human government. It will change and is already changing, together with its corresponding public sphere, under the pressure of numerous economic, social, political, cultural, and technological factors.

New digital technologies have significantly transformed many aspects of contemporary democratic societies. These changes are particularly evident in the for-profit sector, where companies have strived to gain a significant competitive advantage by adopting digital transformation tools. The widespread use of new technologies has altered the perceptions of goods and services' value, satisfaction, and usefulness, displaced established companies and products, and radically transformed industries and markets (Mühlburger and Krumay 2024). Enabled by the innovative use of digital technologies, accompanied by the strategic leverage of key resources and capabilities, and aiming to radically improve an entity and redefine its value proposition for its stakeholders (Gong and Ribiere, 2021), digital transformation boosts innovation, enables the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, creates new forms of collaboration within the organizations and across industries, stimulates the appearance of new business models, and leads to the sustainable usage of organizational resources (Robertsone and Lapiņa 2023). Digital transformation is not limited to introducing new technologies into the business process; it redefines entire business models (Buonocore et al. 2024).

Digital transformation allows a growing interconnectivity between firms and the alignment of heterogeneous resources. Firms increase their scales and scopes far beyond their conventional boundaries thanks to the extensive use of complementary resources, increased automation, the ability to gather and analyze vast amounts of data, and improved process control. On the other hand, increasingly permeable and expanding boundaries make firms more vulnerable and sensitive to external control (Plekhanov, Franke and Netland 2023).

The unparalleled opportunities this digital landscape provides are exploited unequally by economic actors. For example, the European Union had a higher GDP than the United States in 2011 (World Bank 2024), but in recent decades, the EU has been lagging behind the US both

economically and technologically (Arnal and Féas 2024). As Gideon Rachman stated, "From technology to energy to capital markets and universities, the EU cannot compete with the US" (Rachman 2023). Seeing that EU companies have difficulty keeping up with firms in the United States in the new digital economic ecosystem, we can imagine how big the gap is in the case of other countries.

The public sector's outmoded structures, propensity to inertia, and opaqueness mean it lags behind private sector digitalization efforts. On the other hand, citizens expect greater government transparency and user-friendly digital government services (Mettler et al. 2024). Despite the resistance to change in government structures, digital transformation has also produced revolutionary effects in the political sphere. It is true that progress towards e-government is still incremental in countries like Romania (Gavriluță, Stoica and Fârte 2022), but the digital transformation of the public sphere and the political contests rooted in it is so spectacular that it can no longer be overlooked. The multifaceted digital public sphere enables both the dominant public and counterpublics to participate in and shape political dialogues (Xie 2024). Social media serves as a platform for marginalized and voiceless individuals to express their opinions, connect with others, and engage in political activities (*ibidem*). The results of the first round of the Romanian presidential elections on November 24, 2024, highlighted the existence of a counterpublic that could solidify discreetly in the digital public sphere. Mainstream political actors were surprised that an underdog candidate managed to slip through the loopholes in the legislation and leverage the resources offered by social platforms.

Given this context, our article aims to present some essential effects of the digital transformation of the democratic public sphere. We will evaluate the communication practices impacted by digital technologies against the ideal characteristics of the democratic public sphere, highlighting aspects where public discourse may fall short. Besides, we will answer whether digital transformation brings more risks than opportunities to the democratic public sphere. To reach our research goal, we will present the organizing principles of

liberal democracy, the essential traits of the democratic public sphere, the impact of digital transformation on the democratic public sphere, and the risks and opportunities citizens face within the digital public sphere.

1. The Pillars of Liberal Democracy

Liberal democracy does not exist as a natural state of affairs. It constitutes itself wherever citizens' political conduct is significantly governed by the following principles: inclusiveness, political participation, political equality, the predominance of the concurrent majority, the containment and predictability of government power, and the enforcement of the non-aggression principle (Calhoun 1851; Kuehnelt-Leddihn 1974; Young 2002; Gastil 2008). In the communication "Exploring the discursive boundaries of contemporary populism" (Fârte 2017), the above-mentioned organizing principles of liberal democracy were detailed and correlated with the factors favouring the rise of right-wing populism.

Inclusiveness implies an increasing percentage of society's members who possess the right to vote, an expanding pool of potential candidates for public offices, and a fair representation of vested interests in the ever-changing political agenda. In the course of history, the political body consisting of society's members comprised (a) all adult male citizens who served in the army, (b) all adult male citizens who paid taxes above a certain level, (c) all adult male citizens, (d) all adult citizens without any adverse distinction founded on race, color, sex, language, religion or faith, national or social origin, wealth, or any other similar criteria, (e) all adult citizens together with their ancestors (in so far as the living citizens respect the political options of the past generations transmitted by tradition), or (f) all adult citizens and resident non-citizens. The more members of a society are included into the political body, the more inclusive this society is (Fârte 2017, 91).

The expansion of the body politic is positive in principle, but it risks creating problems if made absolute. For example, stopping reforms desired by the present generation out of reverence for traditional political institutions that would seem to be undermined by them is tantamount to exercising the veto

power of past generations. However, respect for ancestors should not prevail over the survival or well-being of the present generation. It is also worth mentioning that non-citizen suffrage can provide valuable input to the decision-making process regarding public affairs, but it reduces the value of citizenship and decreases cultural assimilation or social integration (Stanton, Jackson and Canache, 2007).

While increasingly broader categories of citizens enjoy the right to vote, only a minority of the political body has a real chance of being elected to public office. There are countries where higher officials come from a relatively small pool of people who descend from certain privileged families, graduate from the same elitist schools, belong to the same fraternities or sororities, share the same system of values, etc. (Fârte 2017, 91). In many democratic societies, the body of public office candidates includes significantly fewer women than men. For example, the Romanian parliament elected on December 01, 2024, included 364 men and only 101 women (Belu 2024). Regarding the inclusiveness of the political agenda, one can easily notice that certain privileged problems and vested interests are afforded favourable treatment from public officials (e.g., military pensions or the level of salaries in the public sector) while other issues and interests are ignored or dismissed (e.g., the increase in public debt).

In a vigorous and well-balanced democracy citizens are actively involved in all forms of *political participation* to the upper limit of their civic virtues (such as abnegation, patriotism, loyalty, and respect), civic skills (for example, the capability to dialogue, to work in a team, to negotiate, or to build consensus), and civic conduct (such as behaving in a civil manner, being fiscally responsible, accepting responsibility for the consequence of one's actions, practicing civil discourse, becoming informed on public issues, or providing public service) (Fârte 2017). The low turnout and the tendency of some social groups to surpass the result of free voting by means of obstructive political practice depress political participation and create conditions for the rise of populism. For example, voter turnout in the parliamentary elections in Romania was only 31.84% in 2020, but it rose to 52.5% in 2024. The significant

increase in voter turnout was accompanied by the rise of sovereignist Eurosceptic parties, which together won over 30% of the vote. Electoral absenteeism, followed in the next electoral cycle by a vigorous anti-system vote, indicates deficient political participation.

Political equality is a simple contrivance that allows people who are very different in terms of physical, intellectual, and moral qualities to be treated as equal political actors. The abstract equality of political actors means equality before the law and equal suffrage rights. Political equality is affected when some groups lack practical opportunities to be elected or real chances to politicize their interests effectively. Sometimes, people perceive that certain "privileged minorities" may affirm their identities, can easily politicize their specific problems or interests, and are able to use political means effectively while the ruling class ignores them (Fârte 2017). In every democratic society, marginalized citizens' votes do not seem to matter because their representatives either do not enter legislative bodies or are excluded *ab initio* from governmental coalitions. For example, in the last 24 years, in Romania, the National Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party have governed the country either together or alternatively. The electorates represented by the two parties have primarily benefited from the advantages of holding political power. By contrast, the parties representing the so-called populist or sovereignist electorate were excluded from any governing coalition even though they acted within the law's and the constitution's limits. One cannot speak of political equality, where some political actors are marginalized or ostracised.

A well-balanced democracy needs a *concurrent majority*, namely a numerical majority mixed with the negative power of all conflicting interests. A minority part of society could exert – by its representatives – this negative power through veto, interposition, nullification, check, or balance of power, and they must be able to prevent or arrest the oppressive actions of government (Calhoun 1851, 15). Unfortunately, most countries do not have a true concurrent majority. Moreover, due to chronic low turnout, many countries lack even a numerical majority in relation to the total number of citizens with the right

to vote. Under these conditions, the legitimacy of the political system and the rulers' authority are undermined, and the rise of anti-system political movements is imminent (Fârte 2017).

The *containment and predictability of the government's power* manifests where the government's actions are limited by law and a written or unwritten constitution. Limited and predictable political power presupposes that elections are organized at periodic intervals so that all key positions in government can be contested and the governmental authority peacefully transferred from one group of people to another. Full liberal democracy is undermined where the key positions in government are held in the long run by the same group of people. When populists condemn the so-called corrupt elite, they refer, in fact, to the social groups who seem to exert a monopoly of political power (Fârte 2017).

Finally, to enforce the *non-aggression principle* means to forbid, prevent, or punish the proactive use of force in people's own sphere. This personal sphere is a *conditio sine qua non* for living a truly human life and includes (a) one's life and bodily integrity, (b) one's physical, intellectual, and moral faculties, and (c) the tangible and intangible goods which persons have acquired by the free exercising of their own faculties and capabilities. One of the most insidious violations of the non-aggression principle happens when a government uses its power to enforce certain disputable claim rights. If a society reached a very high degree of honesty and solidarity, it would be acceptable for its government to guarantee some claim rights (for example, the right to education, the right to science and culture, the right to affordable healthcare, the right to a living wage, the right to retirement, or the right to unemployment benefits) by a partial redistribution of income and wealth. Unfortunately, politicians' demagoguery and people's false sense of entitlement often transform government into "that great fiction through which everybody endeavours to live at the expense of everybody else" (Bastiat 2011, 99). Instead of increasing freedom and solidarity, people create a climate of reciprocal spoliation that impoverishes and dissocializes them.

As mentioned above, a democratic society does not automatically constitute when people (especially politicians)

profess faith in the principles of liberal democracy. These organizing principles must imprint the lives of society's members not only when they are directly involved in the political game but also when discussing and debating public interest issues. In an actual democratic society, the principles of liberal democracy also shape the public sphere.

2. The Emergence of the Public Sphere

The following excerpt from Habermas's book *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* is a convenient starting point for understanding the defining features of the democratic public sphere:

> The public sphere cannot be conceived as an institution and certainly not as an organization. It is not even a framework of norms with differentiated competences and roles, membership regulations, and so on. Just as little does it represent a system; although it permits one to draw internal boundaries, outwardly it is characterized by open, permeable, and shifting horizons. The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions. Like the lifeworld as a whole, so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action, for which mastery of a natural language suffices; it is tailored to the general comprehensibility of everyday communicative practice. (Habermas 1996, 360)

The first normative consideration on public sphere states that it is a lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) and not a system. While the system operates through formal mechanisms and regulations and is characterized by strategic action aimed at achieving specific goals, the lifeworld is maintained through communicative action, where individuals seek mutual understanding and coordinate actions based on shared values and norms (Fairtlough 1991).

It can easily be noticed that the distinction between lifeworld and system is similar to the Hayekian distinction between cosmos (or spontaneous order) and taxis (or planned order):

> While a cosmos or spontaneous order has thus no purpose, every taxis (arrangement, organisation) presupposes a particular end, and men forming such an organisation must serve the same purposes. A cosmos will result from regularities of the behaviour of the elements which it comprises. It is in this sense endogenous, intrinsic or, as the cyberneticians say, a 'selfregulating' or 'self-organising' system. (Hayek 1968, 12)

Spontaneous order is the order which *emerges* as a result of the voluntary activities of self-interested individuals who don't intentionally try to create it by planning, manifesting the following attributes (Easterly 2011): (a) Nobody designed it; (b) Nobody needs to direct it; (c) Nobody can completely know it; (d) Everybody can understand its essential aspects: regulative principles, systemic resources, feedback, etc.; (e) Very simple behaviors can result in complex phenomena; (f) It is not automatically good (in all aspects, for everyone and in any circumstances); (g) Every action can have unintended consequences, (h) Partial equilibrium analysis works within the context of spontaneous order.

Hence, the public sphere does not exist as an independent, natural fact; it emerges whenever and wherever people act together in concert following certain regularities and cannot be created or moulded at will by anyone. Like any other order structure in social reality, the public sphere in any society and any historical period is imperfect. Unfortunately (or fortunately), no minority acting as an elite can correct its flaws. This does not mean that we must accept them fatalistically. Everyone can give an impetus to change in a direction that they consider favourable, with the inherent risk of unintended and undesirable consequences.

Secondly, the public sphere does not emerge automatically in specific privileged locations. As Seyla Benhabib noted, any topographical location can become a public space, a site of common action coordinated through speech and persuasion (Benhabib 1992, 78). She added, for exemplification, that a town hall or a city square where people do not act in concert is not a public space, but a private dining room where people gather to hear a *samizdat* or where dissidents meet with foreigners becomes one (*ibidem*).

Throughout history, the public sphere has been tied to various locations: (a) the agora, where polis' citizens from Ancient Greece exchanged and discussed opinions, (b) the rooms in the royal palaces, where the king and nobles discussed the public affairs of the kingdom, (c) Church congregations, where members of oppressed or marginalized groups gathered and articulated their objectives, (d) the salons, where the nobility and the *grande bourgeoisie* of finance and administration met with the 'intellectuals' on an equal footing to discuss public issues (World Bank 2009, 1-2), (e) sites like "Jocan's glade" from Marin Preda' s novel *Moromeții*, where peasants commented on articles from the newspapers, (f) various venues for gatherings, (g) the web pages of social media groups, etc. The plurality and variety of places where people communicate about issues of public interest illustrate that the public sphere is stratified rather than homogeneous.

Thirdly, from the Habermasian perspective, the public sphere is a discursive space where private individuals come together to discuss and debate matters of public interest on an equal footing, relatively free from political and economic pressures (Habermas 1991, 360; Fraser 1992, 112). It is a network for expressing, communicating, and debating educated opinions supported by evidence and logical reasoning. The public sphere is governed by a form of communicative rationality that acknowledges only the force of the better argument. People agree to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions (Calhoun 1992, 1). All manifestations of power and strategic actions are ruled out of court (Gardiner 2004, 42).

The considerations mentioned above normatively describe the ideal form of the public sphere or what the public sphere is in its essential and abstract hypostasis. Nowhere does the public sphere meet these high standards. It is easy to proclaim that everyone has free and equal access to a discursive space in society, but many citizens are culturally and technologically impoverished. In principle, they have free and equal access to a discursive space in society, but in practice, they are excluded or marginalized. For example, digital transformation provides people with sophisticated toolkits for communicating efficiently on the Internet. While most people

passively consume messages elaborated by others, rarely intervening with simple reactions, certain individuals or minority groups manage to leverage artificial intelligence programs, search engine optimization, and social media algorithms to develop and widely disseminate messages tailored to the needs and desires of the recipients. Free and equal access to a discursive space in society does not mean that people equally contribute to the process of forming opinions on public issues in the public sphere.

The public sphere cannot insulate itself from political power and economic forces. The public sphere will always be influenced by politicization, bureaucratization, and commodification that distort reason-based communication between equals. Besides, the public sphere is not a realm of an abstract general interest in which all members of society can participate and have a stake in preserving it. Public interest does not preexist before discussions and debates but arises as a consequence of negotiating the visibility of various collective interests (Beciu 1999, 296). People always pursue their particular interests and often become blind to valid arguments. At best, they accept to pursue "enlightened self-interest" and observe some "conversational constraints" seen as a common interest. Hence, people always communicate and debate opinions in the public sphere guided simultaneously by communicative rationality and particular interests.

Fourthly, although it is legitimate to assume the associational view of the public sphere since people "act together in concert" (Benhabib 1992, 78), it is necessary to accept that the public sphere has a complementary agonistic dimension. People cooperate in discussions and debates guided by communicative rationality, but they also compete for recognition, precedence, and acclaim. Like other games in social life, communicative games in the public sphere have winners and losers.

Finally, Habermas envisages a form of ethical, ideal dialogue that is governed by transparent, universalistic principles and oriented towards reaching mutual understanding and rational consensus (Gardiner 2004, 37). Such a logocentric and humourless language would unfold in a

unique and inclusive public sphere (Gardiner 2004, 42). As M. Makhtin said, multiple voices and languages coexist in the public sphere: "Living discourse (as opposed to a hypostasized ideal language) is necessarily charged with polemical qualities, myriad evaluative and stylistic markers, and populated by diverse intentions" (Gardiner 2004, 35). People communicate ideas and opinions to secure maximum mutual understanding, but they often try to subvert and liberate the established order through humour, chaos, and the grotesque (Gardiner 2004, 43-45). The public sphere is populated with dominant publics, subordinate or marginal publics, and counterpublics that sometimes strive for mutual understanding and consensus and sometimes intentionally disrupt the existing narratives to change the social order.

In conclusion, the public sphere emerges in a society in the way and to the extent that citizens build a communication infrastructure to discuss public issues and influence the decision-making process regarding public interest. The public sphere constantly evolves along the lines of consensus building under the imperative of discursive rationality but also in the direction of mocking, criticizing, undermining, or even changing the existing socio-political order.

3. Public Opinion as a Product of the Public Sphere

Defining the public sphere as a "network for communicating information and points of view", Habermas asserted that the streams of communication enabled in it are filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions (Habermas 1996, 360). Since the formation of public opinion occupies an essential place in the dynamics of the public sphere, it seems appropriate to resume here some terminological clarifications regarding the concepts of individual opinion, collective opinion and public opinion (Obadă and Fârte 2024, 31-35).

A convenient starting point is considering opinion as the expression of an attitude towards a controversial subject (Cutlip and Center 1964, 70). People often invoke facts in support of their professed opinions, but they rarely base their opinions on sufficient facts. They can maintain their erroneous

opinions despite the existence of apparent empirical counterevidence. Unlike facts, which can be recognized or ignored, opinions can be argued or justified in better or worse ways.

Regarding certain subjects, opinions formed are shared by most of society. These opinions seem to rely on the assent or consensus of the entire society. In such situations, individuals with different opinions feel the psychological pressure of public opinion. They see public opinion as a social agency that approves, disapproves, wills, permits or imposes something on the level of the entire society. As a body of social control, public opinion shapes individual opinions and, consequently, the social conduct of individuals. For example, public opinion in Romania approves the republican form of government, the democratic-liberal form of political organization, Romania's membership in the EU and NATO, the organization of the economy on free market principles and the termination of pregnancies through abortion, but disapproves of censorship, the persecution of minorities, the corruption of dignitaries, the existence of "special pensions" and the federalization of the country. There are also topics where public opinion is not crystallized. An example in this sense is cultivating economic relations with African countries. Although thorough works have been written about the formation of public opinion (Lippmann, 1946) and the role of public relations in shaping it (Bernays 1935), no consensus has been reached regarding the definition of the concept of public opinion.

An illustrative example in this regard is the cluster of definitions extracted from the specialized literature by Susan Herbst. Thus, public opinion is considered (Herbst 1993, 438):

- The general will of a political community;
- The opinions attributed to an ignorant public by the media;
- The beliefs of different communities;
- The opinion of the majority, manifested mainly by voting or the opinion of a vocal minority, manifested through the media or in public meetings;
- The opinion adopted by consensus, following public debates;

- The result of elections, referendums, or surveys;
- The fiction that the powerful resort to in order to enslave the weak.

Susan Herbst then notes the existence of four definitional perspectives on public opinion: (1) the aggregation perspective, according to which the public is an atomized mass of individuals, and public opinion is the sum of individual opinions; (2) the majoritarian perspective, which also treats the public as an atomized mass of individuals, but public opinion is associated with the opinion of the majority of the population; (3) the discursive, consensual or Habermasian perspective, which considers public opinion as an entity that emerges from discussions and debates in the public sphere; (4) the reification perspective, which considers public opinion a simple rhetorical instrument, more precisely the projection of what the political elite and journalists believe to be true (regarding a subject of public interest) (Herbst 1993, 439-440). The four definitional perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Some definitions combine two or more of them. For example, Scott Cutlip and Allen Center combine the summative and discursive perspectives when they equate public opinion with "the sum of individual opinions (…) on a problem under public debate and affecting a group of people" (Cutlip and Center 1964, 72).

The theoretical perspectives and definitions mentioned above are valuable for understanding the concept of public opinion, but we believe that some additional clarifications are helpful. First, we believe it is useful to correlate public opinion with individual and collective opinions. An individual opinion is a person's opinion about something. This "something" can be an individual, a thing, an event, or a situation that arouses a strictly personal or collective interest. Individual opinion enjoys the cognitive and affective assent of the person who shares it regardless of whether others have similar or different opinions. For example, a person may hold the individual opinion that withholding taxes constitutes theft regardless of the opinions of their peers and the dominant opinion in society on the subject. The collective opinion is not obtained by aggregating individual opinions but emerges from discussions that take place within a group of people (e.g., family members, coworkers, and residents

of a particular neighbourhood). The collective opinion is ontologically different from individual opinions even though, in the case of some individuals, it may be identical or very similar to them.

Unlike individual opinion, collective opinion does not have a subject – the collectivity – that gives its cognitive and affective assent to it. The collectivity, as such, neither thinks nor feels anything. Everyone's collective opinion is *attributed* to the collectivity he is a part of. The specific form of collective opinion regarding a subject of collective interest depends on the number, quality and argumentative dominance of the people involved in the discussions. Individuals can perceive the consonance or dissonance of individual opinion in relation to collective opinion. For example, a teenager from a traditional family may have a lax opinion regarding sexual relations before marriage, which is in opposition to the more rigid collective opinion that they should be avoided. It is not only the number of those who accept the collective opinion that matters, but also the position held within the group and the argumentative performance demonstrated in discussing the subject.

Public opinion has all the attributes of collective opinion, adding uniqueness at the level of a society and the presence of indirect coercion in its formation. Public opinion emerges under the influence of a political agency that expresses its dominance within society and makes certain opinions prevail on controversial subjects, not necessarily by considering the number of people who adhere to them. Walter Lippmann said that propaganda is impossible without censorship, more precisely, without a barrier between the public and the controversial events discussed (Lippmann 1946, 31). Analogously, we cannot conceive of public opinion without the interpretative filter that the dominant political agency in society places between the public and the subjects on the public agenda.

Like other collective opinions, public opinion is attributed by everyone to the whole society – as a subject *sui generis* – according to their perception of the discursive and coercive dominance of certain points of view. So, we have an explanation of why members of a society consider that public opinion approves of something (e.g. same-sex marriage) even

when, individually, they would disapprove of it. Summarizing the above considerations, we can say that public opinion is the opinion attributed by individuals to the whole society – as a subject *sui generis* – based on the discursive and coercive dominance of those who debate public interest topics. This definition corresponds to a mix between the discursive and reifying perspectives on public opinion.

4. Digital Transformation and the Democratization of the Public Sphere

As mentioned, any human society, regardless of its political organization, has a public sphere where people discuss and debate issues of general interest and where public opinion crystallizes. If a society is genuinely democratic, it is expected that the corresponding principles of its political organization – inclusiveness, political participation, political equality, the predominance of the concurrent majority, the containment and predictability of the government power, and the enforcement of the non-aggression principle – will also characterize the public sphere. In the following, we will try to show what challenges digital transformation raises to the public sphere and answer whether digital changes strengthen or undermine its democratic character. To begin with, we will review a few contributions that highlight the problematic aspects and the reasons for optimism regarding the digital transformation of the public sphere.

Discussing the challenges to digital politics and the tribulations of edifying the cultural public sphere, Benjamin Barber (2001) and Jim McGuigan (2005) mentioned the following adverse effects of digital disruption on the communicative networks: (a) speed, (b) reductive simplicity, (c) user's solitude, (d) pictoriality, (e) lateralness, (f) data overload, (g) immediacy, (h) segmentation, and (i) social amnesia. These problematic aspects are worth considering because they can negatively influence the functionality of the public sphere.

While reasoned dialogue in the public sphere requires time and patience, the high *speed* at which the events unfold and the messages' velocity surpass people's ability to reflect on the situation accurately. While social problems are increasingly

complex, and people need multiple, complex choices, many analyses and decisions communicated in the virtual public arena are phrased in a *reductionist* and *polarizing* style without nuances. Digital transformation favours the emergence of virtual communities that trespass geographical borders. Unfortunately, the same technologies *isolate* and atomize individuals or network them in tribes that hate each other. Democracy needs connected people who can use public reasons politely to justify their stance on specific public issues.

The democratic public sphere emerges and can thrive only where the blind force of emotions is tempered through words. Unfortunately, it is easy to see in the digital public sphere that *images* prevail over words and have a more significant impact than many rational and well-documented texts. It can not be denied that images could have a positive impact when they are used to internalize representations and shape knowledge acquisition. For example, during the Russo-Ukrainian War, digital popular art on social media was used to construct visual narratives that influenced public perception and engagement with the conflict (Kot *et al.* 2024). Nevertheless, images are very often overloaded with emotions that undermine critical thinking and rational decision-making.

It is true that political equality is a pillar of democracy. However, democracy cannot dispense with epistemic and even deontic *hierarchies*. If people do not trust in the authority of those who know what is good and appropriate in some circumstances, social institutions cannot function, and society is falling apart. Unfortunately, lacking trust in experts and institutions, people are vulnerable to fake news and conspiracy theories that spread on the Internet without disclaimers.

The democratic public sphere needs more knowledge, not just information. Reality shows us that people are *overloaded* with unnecessary or pernicious information that exceeds their ability to reflect on it critically. It is admitted that managers' cognitive skills do not increase at a comparable rate with technological progress, and the increasing depth and scope of analytical results provided by digital tools can result in information overload (Plekhanov, Franke and Netland 2023, 826). If information overload creates problems for managers and,

in general, the elite, we can imagine what destructive effects this phenomenon can have on ordinary people. Participants in the digital public sphere must cope with shattering the 'gatekeeper paradigm' that has long dominated the understanding of public opinion formation (Sevignani 2022, 103-104). Digital outlets from classic media companies and established organizations still rely on editorial processes and compromise-building rules and procedures. Professional journalists still act as information mediators who provide context and meanings for the facts. Unfortunately, many people navigating on the Internet, especially on social media, prefer *immediacy*, absorbing unchecked and un-contextualized information.

In the last two decades, social media has contributed to *fragmentation* processes in forming public opinion and the circulation and public reception of news (Peterson 2022, 145). Instead of raising a standard of unity, an interpretive framework of events and political discussions which includes different interpretations, many media outlets are now contributing to the polarization of society and the formation of ideological echo chambers as self-isolating enclaves (*ibidem*). As mentioned above, the democratic public sphere does not need a unique communicative rationality and a general effort to reach a consensus. However, it cannot exist with atomized individuals and sects that hate each other. Finally, participants in the digitally transformed public sphere instill *social amnesia*, showing interest only in the latest thing. The focus on breaking news undermines the tradition of a community and diminishes the meaning of social actions within the public sphere.

In the article "Many Tech Experts Say Digital Disruption Will Hurt Democracy," Janna Anderson and Lee Rainie list several concerns regarding the democratic character of the digitally transformed public sphere (Anderson and Rainie 2020, 5). They observed that new technologies empower the powerful. Big corporations, governments, and political parties have no interest in pursuing a democratic agenda except to the extent that they would directly benefit from the measures taken. The more abundant the resources and the more sophisticated and efficient the tools for exploiting them, the more the powerful will profit from them. Ordinary people

constantly provide corporations and political organizations with a great deal of data about themselves for free. These data are indeed used by companies and political organizations to better tailor their products and services to the needs of consumer citizens. Still, they also serve to strengthen the power position of the providers.

Digitally networked surveillance capitalism creates an undemocratic class system by deepening the divide between the controllers (political institutions and corporations) and the controlled (consumer citizens). Atomized or fragmented into small groups, ordinary people have little influence over the political-economic elite. In contrast, the latter has all the data and tools necessary to orchestrate actions to influence cognitions, attitudes, opinions, and behaviours on a societal or global scale. Citizens' lack of digital fluency, inability to create extensive and consolidated social networks, and apathy produce ill-informed publics, marginal publics, or, in times of economic and social decline, counterpublics. All these types of publics weaken democracy and the fabric of society.

The powerful are motivated and capable of weaponizing new digital technologies to target vulnerable, atomized populations and engineer elections. Even when populist counterpublics managed to organize themselves under the radar against mainstream parties, the latter always found means to counter anti-establishment actions. (The November 24, 2024, presidential elections in Romania represent an illustrative example.) The widespread use of new technologies blurs the line between real and virtual reality and sows confusion in the minds of ordinary people. This atmosphere of confusion tends to undermine ordinary citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

Another worrying fact is the decline of trusted, independent journalism and the rise of social media-abetted tribalism. Professional journalists respond slowly to the information needs of ordinary people because they must primarily disseminate accurate, objective, and factual data. Besides, the same journalistic standards impede them from satisfying the public's emotional needs. Interested in receiving gratifying information, many ordinary people get more

information from influencers who confirm their expectations in their echo chamber on social media than from journalists who could provide them with verified information.

Finally, the speed, scope, and impact of manipulation technologies may take time to overcome as the pace of change accelerates. Pressured by their competitive environment, companies have adapted themselves to digital transformation better than public institutions. Protected by monopoly status, political institutions respond too slowly to the revolutionary changes in the digital environment.

On the other hand, Janna Anderson and Lee Rainie have indicated some reasons for hope (Anderson and Rainie 2020, 6). Individuals are not helpless victims; they evolve. Literacy is spreading rapidly and widely. While the literacy of ordinary people after the advent of printing took several centuries (in many countries, illiteracy disappeared only at the beginning of the 20th century), people of all ages and conditions have formed the ability to receive and post messages on the Internet in a few decades.

Human society is a self-organizing system continuously adapting to incremental and revolutionary changes. The slippages and excesses in the initial phase of digital transformation will become increasingly rare thanks to the assumption by promoters of new technologies of professional and ethical standards commensurate with the risks posed by these technologies. One can see, for example, that public institutions and companies adopt increasingly higher standards to protect citizens' privacy and data security.

Democratic values have always been threatened throughout history. History also shows us that people have found resources to counter the anti-democratic tendencies of the powerful. Easy and cheap access to new digital technologies offers ordinary people more opportunities to oppose anti-democratic actions than their predecessors in other eras have had. Finally, ordinary people are not on their own. Enlightened leaders from the governmental sector, activists, and the enlightened super-rich already help steer policy and democratic processes to empower citizens and produce better democratic outcomes.

In his study "Digital Public Sphere", Mike Schäfer (2015) presents the ambivalent aspects of the digital public sphere, balancing the reasons for pessimism and optimism related to the changes brought about by new technologies. Among the reasons for pessimism, Mike Schäfer includes the following problems concerning the digital public sphere (Schäfer 2015):

- Profound differences between people, social strata or world regions in accessing the internet and in the ability to utilize it;
- The fragmentation of society into small communities of like-minded people because of search engine algorithms and filter bubbles;
- De-politicization and consumerism caused by holding discussions and debates on commercial, profit-oriented platforms;
- Enhancing a false sense of empowerment to the people who do not encounter opposing views because of the echo chamber effect;
- People practice concealing their identity when participating in discussions and debates on social platforms

On the other hand, the author reviews some reasons for cyber-optimism (Schäfer 2015):

- The relatively open, facile, and fast access to relevant information;
- Ordinary people's empowerment to make their voice heard in society;
- The opportunity to create and develop new, decentralized, networked production of communication and content free from commercial logic.

At the end of these considerations on the digital transformation of the public sphere, we will recapitulate some positive and negative aspects, placing them in correspondence with the pillars of liberal democracy: inclusiveness, political participation, political equality, the predominance of the concurrent majority, the containment and predictability of the government power, and the enforcement of the non-aggression principle.

505

Digital transformation enhances the public sphere's inclusiveness by lowering access barriers for different experiences to enter the public sphere (Sevignani 2022, 92). The digital public sphere provides free and open access to everyone for information sharing, equal participation, and deliberate decision-making (Xie 2024). Social media, in particular, is a platform for marginalized and voiceless individuals to express their opinions, connect with others, and engage in political activities. They can choose to strive to belong to the dominant public, marginal public, or counter publics (Xie 2024). Social media also enables contradictory common sense to enter the public sphere, directly circumventing the gatekeepers' filter. Ordinary people upload their genuine private opinions, which amounts to a quantitative explosion of communicative offers (Sevignani 2022, 104). Naturally, this overloading of the discussion agenda with private and unfiltered opinions risks making it difficult to find reasonable reasons to support political decisions.

The rise of digital media makes communication processes in the public sphere participatory, interactive, net-like, decentralized, and transparent, in sharp contrast to those mediated by mass media, that are socially selective, one-way, linear, centralized, and non-transparent (Sevignani 2022, 91). People are stimulated to participate actively in discussions and debates because they do not feel obliged to strive for consensus under the imperative of a unique discursive rationality. They can deride, criticize, undermine, or change the existing socio-political order. Of course, this unfettered political participation carries significant risks. Without minimum concertation, communication in the digital public sphere can become a generalized cacophony.

Communication in the digital public sphere strengthens political equality associated with the flattening of hierarchical structures. Indeed, anyone can have a voice on the internet to express their opinion. On the other hand, only some voices have the same chance of being heard on a large scale. It happens rather for commercial reasons through the effect of filtering algorithms than according to the quality of the opinions expressed. On social networks, the attention and engagement of

participants are treated as commodities. Therefore, algorithms often favour superficial and easy messages that attract the attention of many people over informed opinions that require substantial processing effort on the part of the receivers.

As mentioned, the public sphere cannot insulate itself from political power and economic forces. Any government tends to achieve general conformity by flooding communication channels in the public sphere with messages enforcing its power. While it is difficult for a minority to prevent or arrest the government's oppressive actions through veto, interposition, nullification, checks, or balance of power, the emergence of the concurrent majority is possible in the digital public sphere. The communication networks on the internet are so vast and complex that no government can control them. There will always be a minority in the digital public sphere that discursively combats the official narrative of the majority in an effective way.

The vastness and complexity of digital communication networks also ensures the containment of political power. Freedom from state oppression on privately owned social platforms is facilitated by their commercial status. Protection against state oppression has a cost. Nothing is free in the world. In exchange for the freedom to communicate democratically and free of charge with others, people offer social network owners an enormous amount of personal data that can be commodified.

Paradoxically, the commercial footprint of the digital public sphere brings people closer to respecting the principle of non-aggression. Whatever manipulation underlies them, commercial transactions offer value for value and take place in a peaceful climate. If two people consent to a communicative transaction in the digital public sphere, they both recognize that they are free from oppression.

Hence, digital transformation presents risks and challenges for the public sphere but also significantly contributes to its democratization. As a vibrant, self-regulating spontaneous order, the digital public sphere can activate internal control mechanisms through which negative aspects can be eliminated or kept at a manageable level.

Conclusion

Enabled by the innovative use of digital technologies, accompanied by the strategic leverage of key resources and capabilities, and aiming to improve an entity, digital transformation boosts innovation radically, enables the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, creates new forms of collaboration within the organizations and across industries, stimulates the appearance of new business models, and leads to the sustainable usage of organizational resources.

Digital transformation has produced revolutionary effects in the business sector, but it has also become influential in the political sphere. While progress towards e-government is still incremental in the administrative apparatus, the digital transformation of the public sphere and the political contests rooted in it have already produced major changes.

After revising the Habermasian definition of the public sphere, clarifying the process of emerging public opinion, and presenting the organizing principles of liberal democracy, I listed several important challenges and opportunities to progress regarding the digitally transformed public sphere. Without overlooking the evident negative aspects of the new form of the public sphere, I argued that digital transformation deepens the democratization of the public sphere. The public sphere was never and nowhere perfect, but as a self-regulating system, it constantly improved itself. Digital transformation also provides us with the means to overcome problems and challenges.

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Sexe non humain dans le Manuscrit de Kreuznach : 1843

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Abstract

Non-human sex in the Kreuznach Manuscript: 1843

In 1972, the introduction of a non-human sex by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* produced a disruptive effect. The authors credit Jean-François Lyotard with finding this conceptual hapax in the margins of Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. However, neither Lyotard nor Deleuze and Guattari, who each interpret and develop the theoretical implications of non-human sex in their own way, seriously confront themselves with the Marxian excerpt. This article restores the notion of non-human sex as it appears in Marx's commentary, where it first breaks through as a "truly in real extreme" to challenge the role assigned to reflexive mediation in the Hegelian state, and undertakes a close rereading of those few pages where the said notion bursts in, to pose a hypothesis: non-human sex is the bearer, as early as 1843, of the early stages of the category of proletariat. Towards the end, this text opens a discussion with Lacan's analytic anthropology and with a text by Étienne Balibar on the unassignable humanity of the political subject, to measure the scope of Deleuzo-Guattarian non-human sex as a powerful theoretical-practical tool in support of emancipatory struggles.

Keywords: non-human sex, Manuscript of 43, proletariat, anthropological difference, schizoanalysis

Le motif d'un *sexe non humain* a été d'abord suggéré à Lyotard, puis à Deleuze et Guattari par une critique de Marx à propos du droit politique hégélien — son commentaire de la troisième partie de *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, un texte inachevé auquel il a travaillé en 1843 pendant une crise passée à Kreuznach, mais publié posthumément, en 1927 : texte précurseur donc ou, en tout cas, antérieur au

matérialisme historique, dans lequel Marx va pourtant découvrir toute la violence que recèle une société à l'âge des États modernes. Si nous acceptons comme établie la périodisation proposée par Althusser et nous rallions à ceux qui voient bien une *coupure* dans les œuvres de Marx à partir de 1845, on comprendra aisément que ce n'est pas pour grossir d'une nouvelle thèse sur les *Manuscrits de 1844* les études marxiennes que l'on vient à s'intéresser, au XXIe siècle, à la notion de sexe non humain. Or, aux survivances partielles et aux résurgences relatives des périodes hégéliennes, feuerbachiennes ou proudhoniennes que dans ses débats avec les humanistes Althusser a pu reconnaître dans la critique de l'économie politique postérieure à Marx (Althusser 1973, Althusser 1973, 52-56, 58)[1], nous ferons correspondre ce qu'on pourrait appeler une « anticipation » dans ce qui la précède : la notion de sexe non humain préfigurant, dès 1843, celle de prolétariat (Marx 2018, 285-96). On ne fait pas semblant d'y souscrire ; si un Lyotard a pu retrouver l'inconscient des analystes dans le manuscrit de 43 ou si quelqu'un est prêt, comme nous le sommes, à accepter que Deleuze et Guattari aient, sans peine, accouplé leurs machines désirantes à une certaine notion de sexe non humain, quelle que soit l'idée qu'ils s'en faisaient, personne ne s'étonnera que l'on puisse voir dans ce même manuscrit et dans cette notion comme les prémices d'une catégorie que Marx va lui-même employer, pour la première fois, dans un texte destiné à introduire ses études sur la philosophie du droit hégélien. Dans l'ordre de nos raisons, la première en est que cette idée d'un sexe non humain intervient dans le texte au moment précis où Marx décèle l'inconséquence, voire l'impossibilité qu'il y a faire un usage réel, i. e. non métaphysique, de la *médiation* entre des termes que tout oppose, à savoir la société civile et le gouvernement — évidemment, il faudra voir à quel type de société et de gouvernement nous avons affaire. Une hypothèse dans ce sens paraît déjà dans un article de Isabelle Garo où l'auteure regrette l'absence, en 1843, d'une discussion plus engagée sur la pauvreté que Marx aurait, croit-elle, eue profit à faire fonctionner avec la critique, elle bien présente, du versant libéral de la pensée hégélienne. Garo affirme qu'à une époque

où les économistes anglais ne sont pas encore venus charmer un Marx alors trop engouffré dans la question prussienne, c'est la notion de « paupérisme » qui subsume toutes les tensions sociales et imprime, comme en atteste l'œuvre de Hegel pas moins que celle de son disciple, une allure politique au *sujet* de la pauvreté (Garo 2001, 89-104).

Marx parle de sexe non humain pour avancer la catégorie d'« extrêmes vraiment réels » et ainsi introduire une distinction entre des termes qui s'opposent comme déterminations à l'intérieur d'une même substance (usage métaphysique de la médiation ou médiation réflexive toute courte) et des termes qui s'affrontent dans l'*existence* et que rien ne peut, ne serait-ce que d'un point de vue logique, réconcilier — c'est donc le réel politique qui donne son tort à la logique. La question reste posée de savoir si l'extrême vraiment réel de Marx échappe ou non à la dialectique hégélienne ou s'il peut trouver à se résoudre à quelque moment dans le chemin « qui mène de la différence absolue à la diversité, de la diversité à l'opposition, de l'opposition à la contradiction » (Mercier-Josa 1999, 57). C'est une question à laquelle Lyotard répond par la négative, mais de façon, nous semble-t-il, un peu trop expéditive. Lyotard, qui a souligné le premier tout l'intérêt de cette brève bien qu'étrange digression dans le texte marxien, n'en a cependant pas exploité toutes les virtualités dont il reviendra à Deleuze et Guattari de faire l'inventaire. Il se peut que son commentaire serre de plus près le passage en question que ne le fait celui des auteurs de *L'Anti-Œdipe*. Mais ce n'est qu'au prix d'une dénégation contumace qui en gomme ses traits originaux, comme si le phénoménologue s'y pressait d'opérer la réduction eidétique de toute détermination historico-politique, pour discourir à son aise du « silence » des idées et de la « nuit » des concepts… *mieux vaut être loin de Hegel, que des conflits sociaux pesant lourd sur l'époque du commentateur avisé.* Lyotard écrit : « peu importe ce qui est ici discuté, importe beaucoup ce qui est recherché, et c'est la possibilité de penser une relation sans l'inclure dans un système d'oppositions » (Lyotard 1971, 131-34)[2] — et de reléguer l'affaire politique dans une note de bas de page où il convient que, même si Marx fait tout porter sur « la relation entre les Assemblées d'ordres et la

puissance princière quant au pouvoir législatif », on peut développer le motif d'un sexe non humain suivant deux directions supplémentaires : celle d'une critique de la différence au sens de la dialectique hégélienne, et celle d'une ouverture sur la scène analytique empruntant à Freud les thèmes de la séduction et de la castration.

Or, il nous semble que lorsque Marx parle de sexe non humain, il dit une chose par beaucoup plus simple, à savoir que rien ne peut concilier peuple et gouvernement, surtout pas une opération intellectuelle, syllogistique ou autre. On devra à chaque fois se le rappeler : ce n'est pas à n'importe quel moment de son argumentation que Marx introduit, elliptiquement, il est vrai, sa notion dans le texte ; c'est en mettant la logique hégélienne à l'épreuve de forces politiques que Marx pressentit d'abord la *nécessité* d'un sexe non humain : au point précis où achoppe le syllogisme dès qu'il s'applique à composer en un tout organique — totalité rationnelle, *État* — les rapports qu'entretiennent les pouvoirs en présence : le Prince, le gouvernement, les *états* ou les *ordres*³ (*Stand*) et la *société civile-bourgeoise*, le peuple. Hegel écrit : « Cela fait partie des actes-de-discernement logiques les plus importants [:] un moment déterminé qui, en tant qu'il se tient dans l'opposition, a la position d'un extrême, cesse d'en être un et est un moment organique du fait qu'il est en même temps moyen terme » (Hegel 2013, 381). D'après Hegel, ce n'est que par préjugé que les gens se représentent les ordres comme quelque chose qui se définirait, essentiellement, par sa fonction d'antagonisme eu égard du gouvernement. Si l'on attend d'eux qu'ils en assurent la médiation, c'est que de tout le temps on les a destinés à résoudre leurs conflits et leurs tensions dans la députation. Tant que les ordres ne se sont pas organisés pour *jouer* le moyen terme, ils restent virtuellement dépourvus de subsistance, si ce n'est celle d'exercer, seulement du fait de leur nombre, une pression contre l'État. Or, puisque le gouvernement tient déjà ce rôle *médian* entre le Prince et les ordres, il faut qu'une partie venant de ceux-ci s'apprête aussi à les représenter. Marx de répondre : « Dans le pouvoir législatif, le prince devait donc former le moyen terme entre le pouvoir gouvernemental et l'élément 'ordres'. Or, le pouvoir

gouvernemental est évidemment moyen terme entre le souverain et la société des ordres, et celle-ci se trouve entre lui et la société civile. Comment pourrait-il être le médiateur entre des éléments dont il a besoin pour lui servir de moyen terme, afin de ne pas être un extrême isolé ? » (Marx 1982, 969).

Quelque chose se pointe ici qui vient sitôt à l'appui de notre hypothèse. Un premier indice de ce déraccordement entre la production de catégories dans la pensée et la production des événements dans le réel et qui sera pour Althusser le signe, dans *Le Capital,* d'une rupture définitive avec Hegel. Certes, en 1843, on n'a pas toujours affaire aux « classes sociales », aux « rapports sociaux de production », somme toute, à aucune catégorie marxienne proprement dite. Mais si ce sont souvent moins les notions, les occurrences d'un « mot » que les problèmes et les questions, comme le suggère Althusser, qui nous renseignent le mieux sur les voies ouvertes à la recherche par le travail d'un philosophe, alors nous sommes en droit de nous pencher sur la *Contribution* et plus précisément sur le passage où se tissent comme autour d'un point nodal les réflexions sur cet *extrême vraiment réel* dont le sexe non humain fournit à Marx le premier type.

L'Assemblée législative est le *tout* de l'État politique, à la fois champ de l'affrontement et creuset pour des différences, escomptables, à condition que chaque terme joue le rôle qui lui est dévolu dans l'État rationnel. Pour schématiser les choses, Marx dit que Hegel présente toujours, comme s'opposant, Prince et gouvernement d'un côté, société civile et ordres de l'autre côté. Hegel demanderait des ordres qu'ils soient le moment de la médiation ou le médian entre le gouvernement (médian, quant à lui, entre le Prince et le peuple) et la société civile-bourgeoise. Cette exigence est exprimée au paragraphe 302 des *Principes de la philosophie du droit* et sa nécessité est si formidable qu'il en va de l'existence même de l'État et, concrètement, de sa clôture organique ; la médiation est ce sans quoi l'État politique serait « conceptualisé dans sa ruine » ; — de même que dans sa chambre le peuple n'est pas admis à visiter le Prince, ainsi il peut envoyer sa députation s'entendre avec les membres du gouvernement qui le représentent à l'Assemblée. Deux réalités justifient cette

pétition médiatrice devant conjurer le danger combiné qui pèse sur l'État hégélien : la tendance à l'isolement, au despotisme du Principe princier et celle, non moins irrésistible, à la dispersion et à l'anarchie du peuple. Marx crédite Hegel d'avoir théorisé la séparation entre vie civile et politique, la modernité de cette séparation et l'opposition ferme de ses deux termes. Au Moyen Âge, conviennent les deux auteurs, une pareille distinction entre le citoyen et l'homme privé n'existait encore pas, elle est contemporaine de la Révolution française. Est moderne tout État qui relègue les différences sociales dans la sphère privée comme étant inessentielles au politique. Procédant à une séparation de la société en ordres, le Moyen Âge avait déjà posé l'individu comme identique à sa corporation. De cette constitution qui avait pour base les ordres, Marx dit qu'elle est comme la période *zoologique, le bestiaire de l'humanité,* faisant de l'homme, dans la mesure où il est assimilé à sa corporation, « un animal qui coïncide immédiatement avec sa déterminité ». Puis, le séparant de son « essence objective », la projetant au-dehors comme quelque chose de *matériel*, l'époque moderne aurait commis, selon lui, la faute inverse. Cette seconde division qui se traduit comme celle du privé et du politique, et dont Hegel aura besoin pour restituer, dans son projet d'une monarchie constitutionnelle, l'identité des termes, cette division qui n'est peut-être qu'une conséquence statistique, une donnée démographique posant l'urgence d'un nouveau principe représentatif, cette division donc est le propre de l'État moderne. Pour exister politiquement, les ordres devront alors « transsubstantier » leur statut privé dans la députation et abroger, Marx en tire la conclusion partielle, dans le même coup, leurs différences spécifiques : « En se réalisant comme *idée*, imagination, illusion, *représentation* — le peuple *représenté* [les ordres] qui se trouve aussitôt, comme *pouvoir particulier*, dans la séparation d'avec le peuple réel — le peuple supprime l'opposition réelle entre peuple et gouvernement » (Marx [1843] 1982, 948)[4].

Eh bien, quand on pensait que Marx allait emprunter les détours de l'anthropologie humaniste, se perdre dans des considérations feuerbachiennes (le manuscrit en est, en fait, plein) à propos de l'aliénation et de toute interversion possible

du sujet et du prédicat, le voilà qui rit franchement et qui, aux citations de Shakespeare, mélange un sketch de son cru et nous parle de sexe non humain :

> C'est l'histoire du mari et de la femme qui se disputaient, et du médecin qui voulait faire le médiateur entre eux, après quoi la femme devait s'entreposer entre le médecin et son mari et le mari entre la femme et le médecin. Cela nous rappelle le lion qui s'écrie, dans *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* : « Je suis le lion et je ne le suis pas, je suis Snug ». De même ici, chaque extrême est tantôt le lion de l'antithèse, tantôt le Snug de la médiation. Lorsqu'un des extrêmes clame : « me voici au milieu », les deux autres n'ont pas le droit de le toucher, ils peuvent seulement taper sur celui qui était l'extrême l'instant d'avant. […]
>
> À cela on pourrait opposer : *les extrêmes se touchent.* Le pôle Nord et le pôle Sud s'attirent ; le sexe féminin et le sexe masculin s'attirent également, et c'est seulement par la conjonction de leurs différences extrêmes que l'homme se crée. […]
>
> De vrais extrêmes n'admettent pas de médiation, justement parce qu'ils sont de vrais extrêmes. Mais ils n'ont pas non plus besoin de médiation ; car ils sont d'essence opposée. Ils n'ont rien de commun, ne s'appellent ni ne se complètent l'un l'autre. L'un n'a pas dans son propre sein la nostalgie, le besoin, l'anticipation de l'autre. […]
>
> À propos du premier argument, disons que le pôle Nord et le pôle Sud sont tous deux des *pôle*s ; leur essence est identique. De même le sexe *féminin* et le sexe *masculin* sont tous deux un *genre*, un être, être humain. Nord et Sud sont des déterminations opposées d'un même être, la différence d'un être au plus haut point de son développement. Ils sont l'être *différencié.* Ce qu'ils sont, ils le sont uniquement comme détermination distincte, savoir comme cette détermination distincte de l'être. Des extrêmes vrais, réels, seraient pôle et non-pôle, sexe humain et sexe *non* humain (Marx [1843] 1982, 969, 970-71).

Le texte dénonce par-là les opérations nécessaires à Hegel pour essayer de masquer la pugnacité existant dans une société où le médian et l'extrême échangent ainsi leurs places suivant les orientations du conflit… les exemples se multiplient et la scène de ménage fait irruption dans l'argumentation : « c'est une façon de se faire réciproquement de politesses », conclut Marx.

Or, la référence à un sexe non humain resterait un cas d'exemple marginal, si ce n'était parce que, « en quelques phrases, comme disent Deleuze et Guattari, Marx pourtant si avare et si réticent quand il s'agit de sexualité fait sauter ce dont Freud et toute la psychanalyse resteront au contraire à

jamais prisonniers : *la représentation anthropomorphique du sexe !* » (Deleuze et Guattari 1973, 350). On peut se demander si elle n'ouvre pas encore une autre voie, celle qui consisterait à rompre aussi avec la représentation sexuée de l'humain. Car il est question de faux extrêmes ou d'une différence *au deuxième degré*, pour user d'une terminologie deleuzienne, où l'on obtient : identité dans le concept et différence dans les prédicats : homme et femme se disent tous deux de l'humain. Or, si l'opposition féminin/masculin est repérée comme une différence plutôt faible, venant signifier simplement les déterminations d'une même essence, elle peut en retour avoir pour effet de refouler l'antagonisme homme/femme comme dualité de l'existence, à l'endroit même où le texte affirme qu'il n'y a aucun antagonisme de l'essence — pensez aux féministes qui ont pu reprocher à Marx d'avoir réduit le conflit à une seule différence anthropologique, soit la division du travail[5].

Nous ne savons pas que Marx soit si avare en matière de sexualité comme le prétendent Deleuze et Guattari, et il est suffisamment de textes appartenant à la même période qui en mériteraient une discussion. Or, quoi qu'il en soit, dans l'irruption de cette figure qui devait faire couler beaucoup plus d'encre, il faut voir autre chose qu'un « passage parfaitement banal » et comme la preuve que dès l'époque de son séjour à Kreuznach, en 1843, Marx se confronte différemment à la tradition philosophique et lit d'un nouvel œil ces textes qu'il taxera deux ans plus tard d'*idéologiques.* Arrivé aux réflexions sur *l'extrême vraiment réel*, Papaioannou qui le traduit, écrit, en effet : « Ce passage — parfaitement banal — a donné naissance à un commentaire dont on chercherait en vain l'équivalent dans la vaste littérature marxologique. À en croire Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, lorsque Marx parle de 'sexe non humain', 'il ne s'agit évidemment pas de bêtes, de la sexualité animale. Il s'agit de toute autre chose…' » (Marx [1843] 2010, 478) « Banal », il ne l'est sûrement pas, si comme Lukacs, Hyppolite, Baraquin et à peu près tout lecteur du Manuscrit de 43, monsieur Papaioannou se disait que l'enjeu principal de Marx y était de procéder au démontage de l'ensemble de médiations moyennant lesquelles Hegel veut appliquer sa *Science de la logique* à l'idée qu'il se fait de l'État moderne.

L'extrême vraiment réel

On ne voit pas toujours ce qu'est au juste un « extrême vraiment réel ». Mais nous sentons bien que l'opposition sommaire du privé et du politique n'épuise pas toute la question, et nous commençons à borner l'objet ou la situation qu'il est censé qualifier : ce ne sera, en effet, que par étapes que Marx redonnera au peuple tout son mordant. Si on veut alors refaire l'itinéraire que suivent les « gens », dans un État ainsi conçu, pour accéder à une existence politique, on a d'abord l'*amas* ou la foule inorganique ; puis, en s'y différenciant, ce socle social d'où sortent, armées du besoin et pour répondre à la division « naturelle » du travail, les corporations, les ordres — et, enfin, le petit comité qui représente ceux-ci à l'Assemblée. État de choses auquel Marx s'arrête pour en dénoncer la manœuvre qui consiste à exiger du peuple, après l'avoir charmé en franchissant la porte à sa députation, assez de docilité dans ces *affaires générales* qui ne coïncident dès lors pas avec les siennes : « le voilà [le peuple] accommodé tel qu'il doit l'être dans l'organisme considéré, afin de ne pas avoir un caractère bien déterminé [tranché] » (Marx 1982, 948) — par subterfuge, on demande au peuple qu'il dépose ses intérêts et veille aux intérêts généraux, comme si les uns et les autres n'étaient pas, ne devaient pas être identiques ; quel peut être, en effet, cette affaire générale dès qu'on le pose comme ne coïncidant plus avec celle-là même du peuple ? Sur ce point, la réponse marxienne est sans appel : on a beau destiner une partie de la société civile à cette (f)onction d'intermédiaire auprès du gouvernement ; on peut « monarchiser », pour reprendre le mot de Marx, tout ce qu'on voudra le peuple, il ne reste pas moins réfractaire, à jamais intraitable, impossible de résorber, à quelque moment que ce soit, dans le syllogisme étatique formulé par Hegel. Qu'on lise bien : il ne s'agit pas ici d'une antithèse quelconque, par exemple celle qui oppose le prince et la société civile et qui pourrait, toutefois, trouver une solution dans la rencontre des représentants de l'un et de l'autre à l'Assemblée. Est dite « vraie », « réelle », l'opposition entre le peuple et toute forme de gouvernement, et c'est précisément pour en conclure à un nouveau type d'antagonisme, nouveau,

car absolument tranché, qu'en 1843, Marx frappe la catégorie d'*extrême vraiment réel*. Même un lecteur résolument hégélien des *Principes* comme Eugène Fleischmann en est persuadé : pas de réconciliation qu'entre des termes dont on peut en assurer par avance la vocation. Fleischmann écrit : « Ce serait une erreur de voir dans les classes [*sic*] une force susceptible d'entraver le gouvernement dans sa tâche. La médiation nécessaire entre le gouvernement et la population présuppose l'affinité entre les termes médiatisés » (Fleischmann 1964, 323). C'est donc en stratège que Hegel articule théoriquement les ordres de façon qu'ils médiatisent l'opposition entre peuple et gouvernement pour n'en faire qu'une bagatelle, un menu différend. Mais lisons Marx : « De vrais extrêmes n'admettent pas de médiation, justement parce qu'ils sont de vrais extrêmes. […] L'un n'a pas dans son propre sein la nostalgie, le besoin, l'anticipation de l'autre ».

Nostalgie, besoin, anticipation : trois figures sur lesquelles fait fond le système de la médiation et qui, pour autant qu'elles sont comme ses traits typiques, en appelleraient chacune prise séparément un développement ; appliquées à la différence anthropologique des sexes, elles ouvrent sur une façon habituelle d'exprimer les rapports entre l'homme et la femme, ces deux pôles du *continuum* sexe.

Quand les experts réhabilitèrent les cours de Iéna de 1805-1806 consacrés à la *Realphilosophie*, des épigones tels que David McGregor ont vu, de façon quelque peu hallucinatoire, dans ce *Gesinnung* employé par Hegel pour caractériser l'« image » que les ordres se font d'eux-mêmes, un germe de la conscience de classe : Hegel n'aurait pas légué sans plus à Marx sa méthode (une autre hyperbole chère à un certain hégélianisme), il l'aurait même devancé sur cette conception, on sait combien nécessaire à toute critique de l'économie politique. McGregor va plus loin quand il cite : « 'Ces personnes [le personnage du capitaliste et du propriétaire foncier], écrit Marx dans *le Capital*, n'interviennent ici que comme personnification de catégories économiques, comme porteurs de rapports de classe et d'intérêts déterminés' » — pour aventurer ensuite : « Hegel étant l'inventeur du concept de conscience de classe, il ne serait sûrement pas en désaccord avec l'approche de Marx ».

Mercier-Josa qui discute sur ce point avec McGregor (Mercier-Josa 1999, 286, n. 79), le conteste avec justesse : en plus d'hâtive et au risque d'être grossière, voulant ramener leur nombre et leur différence propre à des qualités morales fixes (le paysan serait l'obéissance ; le commerçant, la droiture incarnée ; le fonctionnaire, l'homme universel, porteur du « sens » du devoir), la caractérisation de Hegel porte sur le *Stand*, « état social », *ordre*, encore une fois, et non pas *classe*. Le terme *Gesinnung*, que l'auteure rend en français par « état d'esprit » ou « mentalité », le type de conscience de soi lié à son métier, ne pose pas du tout le problème de l'exploitation ni la réalité de l'antagonisme (que je sois artisan n'est point la même chose que d'être artisan exploité par mon patron qui détient les moyens de production nécessaires à mon travail et en soutire la plus-value) sans quoi la conscience en est une, certes, conscience toute courte, mais pas conscience de classe. Tout en reconnaissant que le rapprochement des deux catégories n'est pas gratuit, Mercier-Josa précise que la notion de conscience de classe est corrélative des luttes prolétariennes et partant, contemporaine des premières analyses de Marx et Engels sur l'accumulation primitive du capital, question qui a pu intéresser le dernier Hegel, mais dont on cherchera en vain, dans les cours de Iéna ou ailleurs, autre chose que des mentions marginales. Que l'on voit ici se lier un problème théorique avec les conditions historiques de sa formulation, et on pourra mesurer la distance qui sépare les philosophies à dominante spéculative (idéologies) et une pensée qui, pour ne pas avoir à quitter le réel, suit à la trace sa conjoncture propre : parler de conscience de classe, affirmer qu'elle tient aux combats du prolétariat, suppose que les récits sur le sort des ouvriers anglais, sur les luttes paysannes en France, ainsi que des esquisses sur les modes de production, les formations sociales, la composition organique du capital, bref que l'ensemble des catégories critiques de l'économie politique est enfin prêt. En 1843, rien de cela, sauf la découverte d'un point d'achoppement dans le schéma hégélien, un démenti aux fonctions mystifiantes de la médiation réflexive, et la position de cet *extrême vraiment réel* prenant en charge les conséquences des inconséquences de la dialectique quand elle s'applique à la question de l'État —

extrême qui dans le texte marxien, rappelons-le, est rendu (in)intelligible par la double figure de l'anti-pôle et du sexe non humain.

Discussion

L'introduction d'un sexe non humain permet donc de problématiser la « différence » sur au moins trois plans : d'abord, sur le plan logique, soit les déterminations du concept ou ce que Marx appelle la « différenciation à l'intérieur d'un même être » — au sens dialectique, peut-on dire ; sur le plan analytique, la différence sexuelle qui se voit dérangée dans son organisation binaire ou, en tout cas, binarisée par l'analyste, ouvrant la sexualité de toutes parts, selon une formule de la schizoanalyse : *n — sexes* dans un sujet, à chacun ses sexes ; sur le plan d'une anthropologie politique, à l'appui d'un texte d'Étienne Balibar où l'on verra des minorités sexuelles tomber en dehors de l'humain, partout où la prétention à l'universalité de leurs particularismes sera niée, que ce soit au niveau des dispositifs juridiques censés assurer leur inclusion ou à celui de la ségrégation sociale tout courte ; enfin, le sexe non humain entraînera aussi des effets « axiomatiques » et viendra perturber la relation majorité-minorité, en introduisant — encore une fois — une différence que nous pouvons déjà appeler extra-anthropologique.

Le commentaire de Lyotard, même s'il est entaché de phénoménologie, nous propose à la fin une voie plutôt riche, lorsqu'il affirme que le *non* du sexe non humain ouvre ou fait signe vers une autre « scène » qui dépose celle de la conscience, et l'oreille entraînée à l'analyse entend ici, évidemment, vers l'inconscient ou le réel. Pour Lyotard, ce sera le *figural* ; pour Deleuze et Guattari la possibilité de faire sauter le mur de la différence sexuelle dans l'inconscient, une fois dit que le désir investit comme sexuée toute différence sociale ou de classe :

Il n'y a pas de symbolisme sexuel ; et la sexualité ne désigne pas une autre « économie », une autre « politique », mais l'inconscient libidinal de l'économie politique en tant que telle. La libido, énergie de la machine désirante, investit comme sexuelle toute différence sociale, de classe, de race, etc., soit pour garantir dans l'inconscient le mur de la différence

sexuelle, soit au contraire pour faire sauter ce mur, l'abolir dans le sexe non humain (Deleuze et Guattari 1973, 485).

En 1972, Deleuze et Guattari regrettaient, en effet, qu'après avoir assigné au moyen de la théorie de l'*objet a* un élément non humain dans le désir, « hétérogène à la personne, au-dessous des conditions d'identité minima, échappant aux coordonnées intersubjectives comme au monde de significations », les épigones de Lacan aient fini par détourner son enseignement pour « replacer [le désir] dans un axe familial et personnologique » (Deleuze et Guattari 1973, 432)[6] — la question étant de savoir pourquoi cette représentation qu'on appelle anthropomorphique du sexe devait recevoir comme seule figure la génitalité, hommes et femmes pouvant aussi s'exciter, par exemple au contact des étoffes. C'est tout le travail d'Œdipe : l'adhésion à l'espèce suppose l'unité physiologique du corps et la position fixe d'un moi, et le complexe nucléaire de la psychanalyse comme axiomatisation des rapports libidinaux ramène tous nos amours à la famille : il suffit que le désir ait rencontré une fois la mère, pour qu'on y ramène toutes les femmes[7]. Mais le problème n'est jamais qu'on désire sa mère ; le problème c'est qu'on la désire toujours parmi d'autres choses. L'élément du non-humain ouvrant sur la série de tous les sexes, faisant valoir la *puissance d'un indénombrable*[8] dans le désir, toute représentation binaire de la sexualité devrait voler ici en éclats, suivant la formule schizoanalytique : *n — sexes* dans un sujet… à chacun ses sexes.

Il nous semble pourtant que beaucoup plus que le sexe, c'est l'humain qui se trouve déstabilisé dans la position d'un sexe non humain, et bien qu'on soit tenté d'y glisser la plante, les esprits, l'animal, la machine, etc. il est possible d'essayer encore une autre voie — il ne suffit pas, en effet, de taxer d'« extra-anthropologique » (chez l'animal, il est aussi des mâles et des femelles) une différence qui reste toute proche de l'humain, ne serait-ce que sur le plan de son énonciation, comme on entend le démontrer.

Si on demande en quoi la théorie de l'*objet a* avait déjà rencontré un élément non humain dans le désir, la réponse est à trouver dans un texte de 1960 où Lacan, empruntant une

fonction à l'analyse de situations (topologie) découvre un certain nombre d'objets échappant à la métonymie, pour autant qu'ils ne renvoient comme autant de parties à aucune totalité, et il inclut dans leur liste : le regard, la voix et, enfin, le rien (néant), ayant tous en commun de ne pas s'afficher dans le miroir (Lacan 1966, 817-18)[9]. Aussi, dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, comme on l'a vu, l'identité de la société civile et de l'État politique qu'on peut traduire dans celle de l'homme et du citoyen n'était pas posée d'emblée et sans plus ; elle résultait de la médiation qu'opèrent les états entre le gouvernement « en général » d'une part, et le peuple dissous en sphères particulières et en individus d'autre part (Hegel [1820] 2013, 504), le pouvoir législatif étant l'élément des états que Hegel décrit comme un rapport de réflexion de la société civile-bourgeoise sur l'État. Mais, et je cite à nouveau le texte de Marx : « un rapport de réflexion est aussi la plus haute identité entre deux termes essentiellement différents ». On peut alors aventurer ce à quoi la notion du sexe non humain répond dans la Critique où elle n'est pas la seule formule à frapper par son étrangeté, et où il y en a même dont l'énoncé vient préciser le sens, comme celle-ci : « le Moyen Âge est le bestiaire de l'humanité, sa zoologie » (Marx 1975, 137). Marx aurait donc introduit le sexe non humain pour souscrire au point de vue de la séparation de l'homme et du citoyen et pour récuser leur identité, pas moins que celle de la société civile et de l'État politique. S'il salut chez Hegel le penseur de l'État moderne, c'est en effet parce que Hegel a présupposé la séparation de la société civile et de l'État politique, et l'a développée pour en restituer l'identité comme « moment nécessaire de l'Idée ». Cette identité, dit Marx, existait vraiment dans le Moyen Âge : alors « les états civils de la société en général et les états dans l'acception politique étaient identiques, parce que la société civile était la société politique : parce que le principe organique de la société civile était le principe de l'Etat » (Marx 1975, 124). Marx, qui en 1843 ne dispose pas encore des catégories du matérialisme historique, mais qui prend position dans le débat pour ladite séparation verra dans le syllogisme du pouvoir hégélien moins une « réalisation de l'Idée » que l'expression la plus nette d'un conflit partout entre la société civile et l'État

politique — notre hypothèse étant que dans ce manuscrit, la notion de sexe non humain est la préfiguration du concept de prolétariat. Si on revient à la leçon de 1960 où Lacan découvre l'objet partiel, hétérogène à la personne, on peut lire : « un trait commun à ces objets dans notre élaboration : ils n'ont pas d'image spéculaire, autrement dit d'altérité ». Il est, en effet, d'un rapport de réflexion qu'on extrait ce qui opposerait, à en croire tous les clichés, l'homme et la femme : principes actif et passif ; il demande, elle refuse (ou accepte, dans un contexte où dire « non » demeure possible) tout phallus et pas toute-phallus. Marx sait bien que tout oppose peuple et gouvernement. Mais, précisément, la situation moderne ayant posé l'identité de l'humain et du politique, il a besoin d'un terme qui ne se laisse pas métaboliser dans le pouvoir représentatif, qui ne se laisse médiatiser ni par l'élément législatif des états ni par l'État constitutionnel, bref qui ne disparaisse pas dans le syllogisme, qui ne soit ni médian ni moyen terme. Il est d'autant plus vrai que, même si Deleuze et Guattari déclinent le non-humain dans le sens d'une sexualité anœdipienne, Marx ne parle pas de cet ensemble de pratiques plus ou moins érotiques, mais de sexe en tant que variable de l'humain, et développe sa notion comme différence anthropologique pour poser le champ d'un antagonisme irréductible, anticipant ainsi la figure du prolétaire et en fixant son caractère tranché.

Maintenant, si on veut chercher l'institution qui a dans la modernité politique le mieux exprimée cette identité de la société civile et de l'État politique on la trouvera, comme le rappelle Balibar dans son article sur les différences anthropologiques, dans la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme et du citoyen[10]. La Déclaration, chacun le sait, se joue aussi de cette métaphore du miroir : « afin que cette déclaration, constamment présente à tous les membres du corps social, leur rappelle sans cesse leurs droits et leurs devoirs, afin que les actes du pouvoir législatif et ceux du pouvoir exécutif, pouvant être à chaque instant comparés avec le but de toute institution politique », etc. Il s'agit d'un miroir d'autant plus inquiétant qu'il doit tenir ensemble un peuple entier et qu'il est déjà hanté par son image, mais auprès duquel chacun peut venir interroger si ses particularités, pour autant qu'elles s'inscrivent

dans les limites de ses droits et de ses devoirs sont ou non représentées, et si les pouvoirs qu'il vise ont assuré leur inclusion et donné un contenu effectif à cette interpellation d'universalité supposée — on se souviendra ici que pour Marx ce n'était, évidemment, qu'un document de classe exprimant plutôt les droits de la bourgeoisie que ceux de l'homme et du citoyen ou, ce qui revient au même, posant les conditions d'une « universalité civique-bourgeoise », comme l'anticipe Balibar dans l'intitulé de son article. Les mouvements féministes viendront à leur tour doubler cette critique d'une autre ciblant précisément les marxismes, pour avancer que le citoyen de la Déclaration n'est pas seulement le bourgeois, mais aussi et davantage l'homme de l'équation masculin-féminin : le « mâle ». Si cette identité de l'homme et du citoyen est on ne peut plus problématique, c'est justement parce que tout en instituant l'espace d'un nouveau droit, elle est du même coup censée « laver » les différences anthropologiques ou les traiter comme des données prépolitiques (des archaïsmes à fonction moderne, diraient Deleuze et Guattari). Et d'en tirer la conséquence, Balibar écrira que l'humain et le politique étant coextensifs, personne ne peut dès lors être exclu de la citoyenneté sans se retrouver par là même retranché de l'humanité, renvoyé « à une 'sous-humanité' ou à une humanité 'défective' »… — À noter que, pour caractériser la situation de ceux qui se voient nier leur accès à la citoyenneté, Balibar emploie ici l'idée d'un « rapport défectif à l'universel », celle même que les féministes reprochent aux hommes d'avoir mobilisée pour asseoir leur primauté (Balibar 2012, 34), ce qui viendrait confirmer la thèse d'un espace politique taillé sur-leur-mesure : les femmes, ces êtres à qui l'universel ferait défaut, appartiendraient à ce « dehors » où les hommes ne cessent pourtant pas de les reconduire, un peu comme si on lestait quelqu'un avec des chaînes et après avoir constaté la futilité des efforts qu'il engageait pour s'en défaire, on s'écriait : « le voyez-vous ? vous êtes incapable d'être libre ».

NOTES

[1] Thèse ou ensemble de thèses présentes un peu partout chez le philosophe français, en l'occurrence : « 1. Si l'on considère l'ensemble de l'œuvre de Marx, il ne fait aucun doute qu'il existe une 'rupture' ou une 'coupure' à partir de 1845. […] 4. « À partir de là, il doit être possible de rendre compte de la survivance intermittente de catégories comme celles d'aliénation et négation de la négation. Je dis bien survivance intermittente. Car outre leur disparition *tendancielle*… », etc.

[2] Dans la veine des idéologues de tous les temps. La note en bas de page no. 11 : « Il s'agit en fait de la relation entre les Assemblées d'ordres et la puissance princière quant au pouvoir législatif ». Notons au passage que l'intitulé « Sexe non-humain » qui fait partie de la section « L'opposition et la différence » de sa thèse doctorale suit immédiatement la traduction faite par Lyotard d'un article de Freud sur la « négation » (*Die Verneinung*) pour la revue *Imago* en 1925, que Lyotard insère en appendice pour clore le premier bloc de son livre. Coïncidence ou non, le motif d'un possible déni anticipe sur les opérations d'escamotage qui vont par la suite neutraliser les puissances du sexe non humain. Dans cet article, Freud s'entretient à déceler souvent derrière les « refus » et les « dénégations » des patients, l'idée ou le mot de sens exactement opposés à ceux qu'ils expriment explicitement lors de la séance (thèse d'une ambivalence dans l'anamnèse). Rendons à Lyotard donc sa méthode : « peu importe ce qui est ici discuté », alors, il important davantage !

[3] On garde « ordre » (Rubel, Godelier) pour traduire l'allemand *Stand,* afin d'éviter les collusions que la polysémie du terme « état » (Hyppolite, Baraquin) pourrait susciter chez nous, lecteurs éloignés de cette littérature datée — sauf, bien entendu, lorsque l'on mobilise les traductions de ces derniers. Dans cet « État politique » où il n'est encore pas question de *classes sociales*, il y en a, en somme, trois : l'ordre « général » qui rassemble les fonctionnaires de l'État ; l'ordre « substantiel ou immédiat » qui comprend les agriculteurs, et l'ordre « de réflexion ou état formel », celui des trois métiers : les artisans, les industriels et les commerçants.

[4] C'est d'ailleurs pourquoi Marx peut parler d'« illusion politique » quant à l'ordre, dans la mesure où il est en s'organisant en vue d'avoir une existence politique que la société civile, se trouvant dès lors en séparation avec elle-même, perd au moment même où elle y accède.

[5] Elles sont aujourd'hui légion. On lira avec profit l'essai de Gayle Rubin : « The Traffic in Women : Notes on the 'Political Economy of Sex' » où l'auteure entend relire les textes de Freud et Lévi-Strauss à la manière dont Marx lisait l'économie politique de Ricardo et Smith, dans *Toward an Anthropologie of Women*, Reyter, Raina R. *et al.*, New York et Londres, 1975.

[6] Guattari va en tout cas nuancer le propos lors d'une discussion avec Serge Leclaire, peu après la publication du premier opus de *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* : « Je ne suis pas du tout sûr que le concept d'objet 'a' chez Lacan ne soit autre chose qu'un point de fuite, qu'un échappement, précisément, au caractère despotique des chaînes signifiantes », repris dans

Deleuze, Gilles, *L'Île déserte : Textes et entretiens 1953-1954,* Minuit, Paris, 2002, p. 312.

[7] Dans la terminologie « kantienne » de *L'Anti- Œdipe*, Deleuze et Guattari appellent cette opération « paralogisme de déplacement », voir *Ibid.*, pp. 135-137.

[8] Je dois l'expression à Sibertin-Blanc qui l'utilise dans sa confrontation entre Deleuze-Guattari et Jacques Rancière, pour dégager une ligne de force de *Mille plateaux* voulant que les minorités, en vertu de ce fonctionnement paradoxal qui les cause, d'une part, à proliférer suivant les statuts édictés depuis *les* centres du pouvoir et, d'autre part, à se saisir de toute sorte d'énoncés et de revendications, déstabilisent « les axiomes sur lesquels reposent le compte de la majorité », dans (Sibertin-Blanc 2013, 225). Une opération de déstabilisation semblable serait réussie par le sexe non humain dans les « axiomes » de la sexualité normative.

[9] « Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l'inconscient freudien » : « […] Observons que ce trait de la coupure n'est pas moins évidemment prévalent dans l'objet que décrit la théorie analytique : mamelon, scybale, phallus (objet imaginaire), flot urinaire. (La liste est impensable, si l'on n'y ajoute avec nous le phonème, le regard, la voix, – le rien.) Car ne voit-on que le trait : partiel, à juste titre souligné dans les objets, ne s'applique pas à ce qu'ils soient partie d'un objet total qui serait le corps, mais à ce qu'ils ne représentent que partiellement la fonction qui les produit […] ». Est-ce par la relecture de passages comme l'antérieur que Guattari est prêt à nuancer la critique qu'il venait d'adresser avec Deleuze dans *L'Anti-Œdipe* à la théorie analytique contemporaine de leur intervention, lorsque, invité pour s'expliquer à une table ronde organisée par *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, il affirme : « En ouvrant la série des objets partiels, au-delà du sein et des fesses, à la voix et au regard, Jacques Lacan a marqué son refus de les clôturer et de les rabattre sur le corps. (…) Quoi qu'il en soit, il me semble que Lacan s'est toujours employé à dégager l'objet du désir de toutes les références totalisantes qui pouvaient le menacer (…) : tandis que la théorie de l'objet a contient peut-être en germe la liquidation du totalitarisme du signifiant », etc. ? – repris dans Deleuze, Gilles, *L'Île déserte : Texte et entretiens 1953-1954,* Minuit, Paris, p. 310.

[10] « D'un côté, en effet, elle [la modernité politique] a promu ou inventé une notion de 'citoyen' qui ne se conçoit pas d'abord comme le corrélat d'une appartenance communautaire (à une cité), mais comme l'accès un système de droits dont aucun être humain ne peut être légitiment exclu ». […] Dès lors que l'humain et le politique (les 'droits de l'homme' et les 'droits du citoyen' pour user de la formulation instituée par la Révolution française) sont coextensifs 'en droit', l'être humain ne peut se voir dénier l'accès à la citoyenneté (ou à la citoyenneté pleine et entière, dite active, et à la 'capacité de représentation' qu'elle comporte) que dans la mesure où, contradictoirement, il se trouve aussi retranché de l'humanité (plus ou moins, selon les modalités évolutives ou non, etc.) » , Balibar, Étienne, « L'introuvable humanité du sujet moderne. L'universalité 'civique-bourgeoise' et la question de différences anthropologiques », dans *L'homme. Anthropologie du début du siècle* (Balibar 2012, 19-50).).

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Book Review

Banging on the Open Door of Heaven

RETRACTED ARTICLE

Consciousness Across Cultures: Phenomenological and Indian Philosophical Insights in *Waking, Dreaming, Being*

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Evan Thompson's *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy* (2014) offers an intricate exploration of consciousness through the lenses of cognitive science, Western and Indian philosophy, and meditative traditions. Thompson's central thesis posits that the 'self' is not a static entity but a dynamic process emerging from the relationship of awareness, experiential contents, and self-identification. This review critically examines Thompson's arguments and methodologies, engaging with other scholarly works to evaluate the book's contributions and limitations.

The book's structure follows a detailed investigation into various states of consciousness, using a framework derived from Indian philosophy. Thompson delineates the waking state, dream state, and deep, dreamless sleep, adding a fourth state of pure awareness as described in the *Upanishads*. This framework serves as an organizing principle to explore how consciousness and the self manifest and transform across different states. Thompson argues that consciousness is not solely dependent on the brain, a view supported by dialogues with the Dalai Lama and insights from Tibetan Buddhism. Instead, the book proposes

an enactive view of the self (324-326), akin to the process of dancing, where the self is constantly constructed and reconstructed. This enactive view contrasts sharply with the reductionist perspectives that dominate Western neuroscience (325).

Thompson's interdisciplinary approach is commendable, bridging gaps between cognitive science and ancient contemplative traditions. By juxtaposing neuroscientific findings with insights from Indian yogic and Buddhist philosophies, Thompson challenges the reductionist view of consciousness prevalent in Western science. His assertion that the self is enacted through awareness rather than residing as an immutable entity aligns with the phenomenological perspectives of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and the non-dual philosophies of *Advaita Vedānta*. This synthesis not only broadens the scope of consciousness studies but also invites a re-evaluation of cognitive science's foundational assumptions.

In the initial chapters, Thompson delineates the tripartite structure of consciousness according to Indian traditions: 'awareness, contents of awareness, and self-experience' (for more see chapter 3). This framework is effectively utilized to analyze various states of consciousness, including wakefulness, dreaming, and deep sleep. The concept of 'I-making' or *ahaṃkāra*, as discussed in Indian philosophy, is intricately woven into cognitive science's understanding of self-construction. This enactive view of the self echoes Francisco Varela's notion of 'autopoiesis,' wherein living systems continuously create and recreate themselves (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch 1991). As the author puts it:

> "To put the idea another way, when I say that the self is not a thing but a process, what I mean is that the self is a process of "I-ing," a process that enacts an "I" and in which the "I" is no different from the I-ing process itself, rather like the way dancing is a process that enacts a dance and in which the dance is no different from the dancing" (325).

Thompson's discussion on the hypnagogic state and its dissolution of ego boundaries offers a profound insight into the fluidity of self-experience. The hypnagogic state's description, where the ego-structured consciousness dissolves, resonates with Merleau-Ponty's concept of the pre-reflective self. However, the author goes further by incorporating empirical data from sleep

studies, presenting a compelling case for the neuroscientific investigation of these altered states. In the words of Thompson:

> "In everyday life we tend to think of waking and dreaming as two distinct and discrete states. If we're dreaming, then we're not awake; and if we're awake, then we're not dreaming. Yet the ancient Indian image from the *Upanishads* suggests otherwise: like a great fish swimming back and forth between the banks of a wide river, we journey between waking and dreaming. This image hints of deeper currents beneath the surface while allowing for intermediate areas and eddies where waking and dreaming flow into each other. One place where this confluence happens is the hypnagogic state" (110).

The examination of lucid dreaming in chapters four through six exemplifies Thompson's strength in synthesizing diverse perspectives. Lucid dreaming, where the dreamer becomes aware of dreaming, is used to explore the nature of self-awareness. Thompson's reference to Tibetan Buddhist practices of 'dream yoga' provides a cultural and spiritual context, enhancing our understanding of the cognitive mechanisms involved (151-165). The comparison between lucid dreaming and mindfulness meditation underscores the parallels between self-regulation and metacognitive awareness. This section could have been further enriched by engaging with Stephen LaBerge's pioneering work on lucid dreaming, which provides extensive empirical data supporting Thompson's claims (LaBerge 1985).

Chapter seven's analysis of out-of-body experiences (OBEs) reinforces the book's central thesis that self-experience is contingent on perceptual and attentional processes. Thompson convincingly argues that OBEs are not disembodied experiences but rather altered embodiments, where the self's location shifts according to perceptual perspectives. He contends, "Like dreams, out-of-body experiences are mental simulations or creations of the imagination, but like lucid dreams, they're subject to voluntary control, and you can know when you're having one" (205). This argument aligns with Thomas Metzinger's theory of the 'phenomenal self-model,' which posits that the self is a virtual construct created by the brain (Metzinger 2009). However, Thompson's critique of neuro-nihilism[1] and his insistence on the primacy of consciousness suggest a more nuanced understanding, emphasizing the need for a balanced view that acknowledges both neuroscientific and phenomenological insights.

The book's enactive view of the self aligns with the works of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), who propose an embodied approach to cognition. Their concept of the embodied mind emphasizes that cognition arises from the dynamic interaction between the brain, body, and environment. Thompson extends this notion by incorporating insights from Indian philosophy, suggesting that the self is not only embodied but also constantly enacted through awareness (67-75). In contrast, Metzinger (2009) argues that the self is an illusion created by the brain, a view the author critiques as "neuro-nihilism" (322). Metzinger's theory of the self-model posits that our sense of self is a mental construct with no real existence. As he puts it: "there is no such thing as a self. Contrary to what most people believe, nobody has ever *been* or *had* a self… to the best of our current knowledge there is no thing, no indivisible entity, that is *us*, neither in the brain nor in some metaphysical realm beyond this world" (Metzinger 2009: 1). Thompson challenges this view by drawing on Indian philosophical concepts of 'I-making' (*ahaṃkāra*) and pure awareness, arguing that while the self is constructed, it is not an illusion but an ongoing process of enactment (325-331).

Thompson's critique of the standard neuroscientific view of dreaming as a form of delusional hallucination is compelling (179). According to Thompson, "What exactly is a dream? A dream isn't a random false perception; it's a spontaneous mental simulation, a way of imagining ourselves a world" (184). The dreaming must be understood as imagination rather than delusional hallucination perception. Dreaming is an imaginative state fuelled by memory and emotions rather than a hallucinatory state cut off from sensory inputs. 'Imagination' is a part of dreaming consciousness; in nonlucid dreams, it is the basis for our perception of our dream ego. We encounter the dream world with both our dream self and dream ego when we have lucid dreams. Dreaming is the result of 'spontaneous imagination' at work; it is not an 'offline hallucination.' We are imaginative humans, not just machines that dream. *We view the world imaginatively rather than experiencing hallucinations*. However, it could engage more critically with contemporary theories in dream research. Hobson's (2002) 'activation-synthesis hypothesis,' which posits that dreams result from the brain's attempt to make sense of random neural activity, represents a significant viewpoint in the field. Addressing this theory in greater detail would provide a more balanced critique and

underscore the book's argument that dreaming is a form of spontaneous imagination (127: 183-184).

The book's most controversial assertion lies in chapter eight, where Thompson entertains the possibility of consciousness persisting in deep and dreamless sleep. Drawing from Indian philosophical traditions, he challenges the prevailing scientific view that consciousness fades completely in this state. He states: "For *Yoga* and *Vedānta*, whereas dreaming is a form of object-directed consciousness—the objects in dreams being mental images—dreamless sleep is a mode of consciousness without an object. Similarly, according to Tibetan Buddhism, deep sleep is a state of 'subtle consciousness' without sensory or cognitive content, and it's the basis upon which dreaming and waking consciousness arise" (251). While Thompson presents preliminary evidence from meditative practices suggesting subliminal awareness, this claim remains speculative. Further empirical research is needed to substantiate these assertions, particularly in the context of Western scientific paradigms. Engaging with the works of philosophers like Thomas Nagel, who argue for the subjective nature of consciousness, could have strengthened this discussion (Nagel 1974).

Thompson's exploration of death and the dissolution of the self in chapter nine is both poignant and thought-provoking. His critique of the biomedical perspective on death highlights the inadequacy of understanding death solely as a biological event. The incorporation of Tibetan Buddhist accounts of the dying process provides a holistic view, emphasizing the subjective and experiential aspects of death (275-285). This chapter invites readers to reconsider the nature of consciousness and selfhood in the face of mortality, a theme that resonates with existentialist thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre, who emphasized the inevitability of death in shaping human existence (Sartre 1956).

The book employs a phenomenological approach, emphasizing first-person accounts of consciousness and self-experience. This methodology is valuable for exploring subjective aspects of consciousness that are often overlooked in third-person scientific studies. The inclusion of personal narratives and experiential insights enriches the discussion and provides a holistic understanding of consciousness. However, the reliance on phenomenology also has its limitations. The subjective nature of phenomenological accounts can make them difficult to verify or generalize. While Thompson acknowledges the need for empirical

validation, the book could benefit from a more systematic integration of experimental data to support its phenomenological claims.

The book makes significant contributions to both cognitive science and philosophy by proposing a new framework for understanding consciousness and the self. By integrating insights from Indian philosophy, it challenges the reductionist tendencies in Western neuroscience and offers a more holistic view of the mind. Thompson's call for a contemplative science that combines cognitive science with meditation practices is particularly noteworthy. This approach has the potential to enrich our understanding of consciousness and provide new methodologies for studying the mind. The book's exploration of meditative states and their impact on consciousness aligns with the growing interest in the neuroscience of meditation (Wallace 2012).

To sum up, I believe *Waking, Dreaming, Being* is a thought-provoking work that pushes the boundaries of consciousness studies by integrating cognitive science with contemplative traditions. Thompson's enactive view of the self as a process rather than a static entity which closely aligns with *Advaita* and *Buddhism* offers a compelling alternative to reductionist models, inviting a rethinking of the nature of consciousness. Despite some speculative elements and occasional lack of critical engagement with opposing views, the book's interdisciplinary approach and rich synthesis of diverse perspectives make it a valuable contribution to both academic and contemplative discourses. And for this, I would thank Evan Thompson for bridging the gap between Indian philosophy and Western neuroscience with his insights from the contemporary philosophy of mind. Future research should continue to explore the intersections between cognitive science and contemplative practices, furthering our understanding of the complex nature of consciousness.

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NOTES

[1] "Neuro-nihilism posits that for the self to exist, it must be an independently real entity or indivisible thing. However, since no such entity is found in the

brain, neuro-nihilism concludes that if we perceive ourselves as possessing or being an independently real self, this perception must be an illusion generated by the brain" (322-323).

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Note de lecture : Éric Weil, *Philosopher avec Critique*

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Éric Weil, *Philosopher avec Critique*, Introduction, édition et notes par Patrice Canivez, Gilbert Kirscher et Sylvie Patron, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2023, 773 p.

Le volume *Philosopher avec Critique* rassemble les textes publiés par Éric Weil dans la revue *Critique*, entre 1946 et 1971. La plupart des textes – articles et notes de lecture – recouvrent la période de la participation de Weil au comité de rédaction de la revue, période dans laquelle il a été « l'interlocuteur privilégié de Georges Bataille » (Patron 2023, 8). Ont collaboré à la réalisation de ce volume Patrice Canivez, Gilbert Kirscher et Sylvie Patron.

La présentation générale de la contribution d'Éric Weil au comité de rédaction de la revue *Critique* est faite par Sylvie Patron, sous la forme d'une mise en narration des relations complexes entre ceux qui ont participé à la réalisation de ce grand projet culturel de l'après-guerre. L'usage de documents d'archive, notamment de lettres (de Georges Bataille, d'Éric Weil, de Pierre Prévost, de Jean Piel), permet au lecteur de saisir le contexte intellectuel, idéologique et psychologique dans lequel ont travaillé les grandes personnalités de la vie culturelle française, qui ont contribué à la revue *Critique*.

L'objectif de Sylvie Patron est double. D'une part, il faut établir l'influence que Weil a exercée sur la « formule » de *Critique*, en tant que membre du comité de rédaction. D'autre part, il faut analyser « l'incidence, sur Critique » des articles publiés par Weil dans la revue, en tant que philosophe. Grande spécialiste de la théorie de la narration (et des études sur *Critique*), Patron choisit la stratégie de la mise en intrigue de la pensée de Weil, en interrogeant le rapport entre l'engagement politique de l'individu, tel qu'il résulte de ses prises de position stratégiques à l'intérieur du champ culturel-organisationnel, et la raison publique de la philosophie, telle qu'elle est pratiquée par Weil dans ses publications. D'une part, le marxisme de Weil était de notoriété à l'époque. D'autre part, « dans les articles qu'il publie dans *Critique*, comme dans ses autres ouvrages de l'époque, Weil n'apparaît jamais comme un militant, ni comme un intellectuel, ni comme un théoricien communiste » (Patron 2023, 24). Ici, Patron se montre redevable à Gilbert Kirscher, l'élève direct d'Éric Weil et l'exégète principal de son œuvre, qui avait analysé l'engagement politique de Weil dans une conférence de 2020.

Dans sa présentation générale, Sylvie Patron montre un intérêt légitime pour le problème du marxisme de Weil ; en effet, à l'époque de *Critique*, le philosophe s'intéressait beaucoup aux problèmes de l'histoire, de la modernisation, de la politique, de ce qu'on peut appeler en général « les problèmes de l'après-guerre ». Elle saisit le moment précis où Éric Weil est devenu moins engagé : « en 1950, pendant la période de tractations et de démarches qui prélude à la reparution de Critique aux Éditions de Minuit, Weil semble moins politisé qu'auparavant » (Patron 2023, 24). Une référence à la correspondance de Weil le prouve – il s'agit d'une déclaration de Weil qui « contraste avec certaines prises de position antérieures » (ibid.). Weil avait dit [à ce moment-là] que la cohérence et la compétence des collaborateurs est plus importante que leurs convictions et leurs préférences : « et au risque de vous étonner, je proposerais plus de libéralisme dans ce sens, non point plus de sévérité » (Weil, cité par Patron 2023, 24).

Il est possible que l'honnêteté méthodologique de Sylvie Patron n'assure pas le contentement du lecteur philosophe, et cela pour deux raisons. D'abord, parce que les qualifications « plus politisé » - « moins politisé » ne peuvent se mesurer que sur une échelle mobile qui se définit en fonction des interactions et des préférences, et par rapport à une certaine sphère d'intérêt : le couple efficacité-justice dans le concret historique. Dans les textes publiés, on ne peut détecter un état d'esprit « plus politisé » et un autre état d'esprit « moins politisé » que si on se rapporte à la question de la modernisation soviétique (voir Canivez 2023, 65). Et l'affaire ne touche pas le système conceptuel de Weil. En revanche il serait intéressant de voir si l'analyse du discours (des archives) pourrait offrir une réponse concernant les facteurs qui ont pu provoquer un tel changement. Par exemple, est-ce l'interruption de la publication de *Critique* (en 1949) et la reprise par un autre éditeur (Minuit) qui a provoqué le changement ? est-ce la publication de la *Logique de la philosophie* ? est-ce le passage à une autre étape de la vie (la sagesse) ?

En ce domaine, la méthode philosophique ne peut donner des réponses satisfaisantes. Patrice Canivez, par exemple, donne de l'évolution en question l'explication philosophique suivante : « l'espace de discussion n'est pas configuré une fois pour toutes. La formulation du problème progresse au cours de la discussion, mais l'espace même de la discussion évolue en fonction des transformations successives du problème » (Canivez 2023, 54). C'est une noble explication dans l'ordre du discours philosophique, mais cela ne va pas au-delà du discours philosophique. Supposons qu'un certain Karl Marx – simple personnage fictionnel – avait tenté de publier certains de ses textes dans *Critique*. Comment Éric Weil aurait-il *réagi* ? Si nous prenons comme fil rouge l'exégèse philosophique, on répondra ainsi : vraisemblablement, Éric Weil aurait dit « non » à la publication du *Manifeste* ; certainement il aurait dit « oui » à la publication (en feuilleton) du premier volume du *Capital* ! C'est de l'analyse de l'œuvre que le lecteur philosophe tire cette conviction ; cela n'exclut pas qu'il se trompe ; il ne reste pas moins que sa

conviction est fondée dans un jugement bien pesé, jugement qui cherche à établir un équilibre réflexif entre attitude et discours, entre vie et œuvre. Mais comment répondre à la question si, en faisant l'analyse de la correspondance, on opère avec les valeurs « plus politisé » - « moins politisé » ? Par hypothèse, la réponse serait que Weil aurait dit « oui » à la publication du *Manifeste*, dans la phase « plus politisée », en revanche il aurait dit « non » dans la phase « moins politisée ». Si cette hypothèse contrefactuelle exagère les dimensions du problème, c'est juste pour faire comprendre le point, *per absurdum*.

Ensuite, il peut y avoir un certain mécontentement en raison de la méthode utilisé par Patron. Je dirai que, s'il y a une certaine insuffisance de la méthode, cela ne vient pas d'un mauvais choix : elle est liée plutôt au découpage de l'objet par la discipline elle-même. En analysant la correspondance autour de *Critique*, Patron doit suivre des méthodes appropriées pour l'analyse de la correspondance. Il va de soi que la correspondance dans la vie d'une organisation est une interaction stratégique qui ne s'analyse pas par les techniques usuelles de l'exégèse. En ligne générale, les méthodes des sciences sociales modernes n'admettent pas la supposition que l'œuvre du génie est l'expression fidèle de sa vie : la vie de l'homme moderne est fragmentée par les jeux (de rôles) qu'il joue, bon gré mal gré ; il est impossible de trouver un principe d'unité de ces jeux. Bien entendu, l'homme reste lui-même ; son identité profonde justifie encore l'utilisation d'une méthode holiste pour analyser ses actes (le principe de responsabilité, le principe d'autorité etc.). Or, même le philosophe [roi] doit admettre qu'il n'a pas le pouvoir de définir tous les jeux auxquels il participe en tant que membre de la société : il peut en faire l'effort, mais son effort sera toujours le phénomène d'un pouvoir allant à l'encontre d'autres pouvoirs. Pour comprendre le jeu, il faut se placer dans la perspective du jeu.

Analyser la correspondance autour de la revue *Critique*, c'est analyser un jeu social – ce n'est pas la communication libre des savants en tant que savants (Spinoza à Oldenburg) : c'est la communication des savants en tant que membres d'une

organisation (Weil et Bataille dans le même jeu, c'est plutôt bizarre, mais c'est comme ça). Par conséquent, je ne suis pas surpris de la manière un peu maladroite dont Patron juge la contribution du *philosophe*. D'une part, elle constate qu'il y a comme un rideau entre la philosophie publique de Weil et son activisme politique dans les cercles « privés ». D'autre part, sa méthode exige de lire les textes *philosophiques* à la lumière de l'agenda *stratégique*. En parlant de *l'incidence* de ces textes sur *Critique*, Patron reste dans l'univers des sciences sociales : « incidence » se dit « influence », et « influence » c'est l'autre nom du pouvoir – ou du déterminisme qui explique une philosophie par la prise de position stratégique à l'intérieur d'un champ de relations.

La présentation faite par Patron dans le volume suit de près le travail qu'elle avait fait antérieurement sur la correspondance autour de *Critique* (Patron 2014). A cette occasion, Patron avait détecté dans les lettres de Weil [à Bataille] certaines prises de positions qui relèvent du métier de philosophe. Par exemple, dans l'affaire Etiemble – qui avait provoqué un vif débat au sein du comité de rédaction, au sujet du marxisme, de la révolution et du Parti communiste – « Weil s'exprime en philosophe, spécialiste de philosophie politique […] et des rapports entre Hegel et Marx » (Patron 2014, 18). Il y a peu de choses à dire contre l'usage de ce procédé dans l'analyse de la correspondance. Cela serait encore juste dans le cadre d'un panorama de l'histoire intellectuelle en France, après la deuxième guerre mondiale, dont l'histoire de *Critique* ne constitue qu'un épisode. Mais il peut y avoir une sorte de déformation systématique de la compréhension, lorsqu'on exporte ce procédé à l'évaluation de la contribution substantielle du philosophe Éric Weil, dans *Critique*.

Afin de m'expliquer, je vais encore avancer une hypothèse contrefactuelle. Supposons que je suis un étudiant qui lit l'analyse de Patron. Voici ce que j'ai noté dans mon carnet : « Éric Weil a été un intellectuel marxiste. Il a été membre du comité de rédaction de la revue *Critique*. De métier, il a été philosophe. Il n'a pas exprimé ses vraies pensées dans sa philosophie. Il les a exprimées pourtant dans sa correspondance ». J'espère que mon hypothèse liminale,

toujours exagérée, explique suffisamment ce que j'ai voulu dire en employant l'expression « déformation systématique de la compréhension ».

Tout dépend de la manière dont on formule le problème. Si on l'avait formulé autrement, on aurait dit que Weil s'intéressait à Marx à la manière dont un Sage s'intéresse à un problème d'actualité : « il est engagé dans le monde de son époque" (Weil 1947, 2). Le marxisme est *intéressant* dans la mesure où il constitue une modalité de penser les problèmes de l'actualité. L'explication de l'intérêt de Weil pour le marxisme se trouve dans le texte de Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung ?* En regardant la table de matières du volume *Philosopher avec Critique*, on peut saisir que Weil s'intéressait à tout ce qui peut avoir une certaine importance pour la pensée de l'actualité : Machiavel [*aujourd'hui*], Clausewitz, Rousseau, Bayle, l'Etat multinational, le rapport entre christianisme et politique, l'histoire du parlementarisme anglais, les problèmes de l'Allemagne, le nationalisme, la liberté de la presse etc.

L'analyse de la correspondance ne couvre pas tout ce champ d'investigation qui va au-delà du cercle [de *Critique*]. Il faudrait peut-être faire l'analyse d'autres archives de correspondance pour voir comment les différents textes d'Éric Weil ont été reçus par le public savant. Le travail de Sylvie Patron sur *Critique* ne constitue qu'un point de départ. Son mérite incontestable est d'apporter des éléments inédits à la réception des textes philosophiques d'Éric Weil. Par ailleurs, ses conclusions sont confirmées par Patrice Canivez (2023, 65, n.1) dans son introduction intitulée « Éric Weil et *Critique*, une pratique de la philosophie ».

Dans le texte respectif, Canivez propose une discussion sur la manière dont les textes publiés par Éric Weil dans *Critique* sont liés à la philosophie systématique. Je me contente de suivre les moments principaux de l'introduction de Canivez, afin d'en saisir la « logique », car la tâche de son introduction recouvre ma tâche et, en quelque sorte, la rend inutile – à part le fait que la tâche de mon propos est de simplifier affreusement le sien. Son texte peut paraître trop développé, si on tient compte du fait que les articles « sérieux »

publiés par Weil dans *Critique* avait déjà été repris dans *Essai et conférences*. Mais il doit avoir ses raisons : la nouvelle formule de publication – initiée par Gilbert Kirscher – constitue une opportunité non seulement pour promouvoir la pensée d'Éric Weil, mais aussi pour développer l'exégèse dans une direction nouvelle. Canivez est le spécialiste réputé de la philosophie politique de Weil ; il est donc l'autorité compétente pour analyser la relation entre l'œuvre principale de 1956 et ces textes de *Critique* (1948-1953) dont la « dimension commune […] c'est l'approche historique et l'intérêt pour l'histoire. [Car] Éric Weil consacre de nombreux articles à l'histoire sociale et politique, mais aussi à celle de la culture et des idées, depuis l'histoire de la Renaissance jusqu'à l'histoire mondiale (la *Weltgeschichte*) » (Canivez 2023, 41).

L'auteur de l'introduction part du constat que les textes de Weil sont de deux types : des notes de lecture, d'une part, et des textes théoriques, d'autre part. Les textes théoriques traitent soit d'un auteur important, soit d'un problème. Selon Canivez, tous ces textes constituent une « pratique » de la philosophie. Cette qualification exige une justification, et cette justification occupe pratiquement toute l'étendue de l'introduction. La technique de Canivez est d'intégrer la présentation des faits dans le mécanisme justificatif d'une thèse. Cet aspect méthodologique me semble caractéristique du style philosophique de Canivez : il introduit le lecteur à la fois dans l'univers thématique et dans le mécanisme de justification. Pourquoi donc s'agit-il d'une pratique de la philosophie dans ces textes d'Éric Weil ?

Tout d'abord, on trouve dans ces textes un certain nombre de références culturelles et historiques qui manquent complètement de l'approche « plus formelle » de la philosophie systématique (*Logique de la philosophie*, *Philosophie politique*, *Philosophie morale*). En me substituant à Canivez, je dirais que les notes de lecture et les articles mettent en jeu une modalité de réflexion qui est typique pour le stade de laboratoire : on y découvre soit une généralisation qui part du cas concret pour formuler un problème, soit une application des concepts abstraits afin de les « vérifier » dans la rencontre avec la réalité. Sur le plan stylistique, la philosophie

systématique de Weil n'indique ni les situations, ni les auteurs qui correspondent à telle catégorie du discours abstrait. « Éric Weil cite peu […] C'est au lecteur de reconnaître […] » (ibid., 51). En revanche, « les articles réunis dans ce volume, *Philosopher avec Critique*, ont une importance spécifique. C'est la partie concrète du corpus weilien […] ».

Ensuite, il s'agit d'une pratique de la philosophie parce que les articles de Weil mettent en jeu une stratégie méthodologique qui relève du *socratisme* (voir Osiris 1990). D'habitude on comprend par « socratisme » une conception de la philosophie dont « le concept central est celui du dialogue » (Canivez 2023, 43). Le dialogue socratique se comprend comme effort raisonnable de saisir l'argument de l'autre et, dans le cas où cet argument est faible, de le renforcer afin de ne pas combattre un homme de paille. Canivez développe cette problématique du dialogue, qui est centrale dans le système weilien. Weil part du constat que toute grande philosophie historique est une [disons *petite*] logique : elle constitue l'effort de l'homme raisonnable de sortir de la violence qui s'exprime à travers les discours contradictoires, « elle est parfaitement capables d'élaborer une forme de cohérence qui la rend inexpugnable » (Canivez 2023, 44). Il y ainsi une pluralité de paradigmes philosophiques dont chacun constitue une forme de cohérence : mais il y aussi une « querelle » métahistorique des systèmes, pour la raison que les systèmes coexistent dans les conceptions du monde : ils se succèdent, mais aucun ne disparaît complètement. La [disons *grande*] logique de la philosophie constitue en fait une métaphilosophie qui rend la paix aux systèmes :

> [Elle] reconstruit ces différentes *logiques* du discours. Elle explicite des types idéaux de discours cohérent. Chacun de ces types est organisé autour d'un concept central que Weil appelle catégorie philosophique. Ce concept exprime ce qui est vécu comme essentiel dans une « attitude » donnée. Il permet d'articuler un discours cohérent sur le réel. La tâche que s'assigne la *Logique de la philosophie*, c'est d'expliciter les différentes attitudes et catégories philosophiques, c'est de saisir la logique de ces manières de penser qui sont aussi des façons d'être. (Canivez 2023, 44).

Il n'est pas sans intérêt, ici, de voir en quoi consiste la différence entre la *Logique* de Weil et celle de Hegel. Canivez

l'a précisé à d'autres occasions ; si je reprends la question, c'est seulement pour faire mieux comprendre son propos. D'une part, Weil saisit que les philosophies historiques ne disparaissent pas ainsi que Hegel l'avait postulé : elles sont peut-être achevées et consommées, mais on peut toujours continuer de penser dans le système de Kant, de Saint-Thomas ou d'Aristote – c'est ce que Weil appelle une *reprise*. Il en résulte que la querelle des systèmes peut continuer sur le plan historique, bien que ces systèmes soient « morts » sur le plan logique [au sens hégélien]. L'incommensurabilité des conceptions du monde constitue ainsi une pathologie de l'argumentation : il peut y avoir des situations où le meilleur argument ne l'emporte pas. L'homme accepte l'idée de cohérence de la raison, mais il ne peut pas sortir de la cohérence de son discours : il s'enferme dans le discours comme dans une vérité ultime, en refusant tout discours alternatif. Son discours cohérent est en contradiction avec d'autres discours, ce qui fait que l'incohérence surgit de nouveau dans le monde, comme violence. D'autre part, Hegel n'avait pas saisi la possibilité, absurde pour lui, que l'homme puisse refuser consciemment la raison. Or, le mal radical dont parlait Kant (en excluant la possibilité de sa réalisation) s'est incarné dans l'expérience historique du totalitarisme.

En conséquence, Éric Weil s'est donné la tâche d'élaborer un système de toutes les possibilités logiques et historiques des discours, afin d'assurer que la coexistence en paix des conceptions du monde qui sont raisonnables peut se réaliser. Tous les discours qui sont bâtis sur l'idée de cohérence et acceptent la loi de la raison sont dorénavant entraînés dans le projet commun de combattre le mal radical. La catégorie de l'Action constitue la condition de possibilité pour la rencontre sans violence de tous les discours raisonnables car, lorsque les discours se font action, ils se soumettent à l'impératif de la loi morale ; il est donc exigible que tout discours soit éducation à la raison et à la liberté. Ainsi, la notion de dialogue reste essentielle, car elle constitue la condition de possibilité de la compréhension et de l'action dans un monde où le choix des conceptions reste libre. Weil redécouvre ainsi la notion de base du libéralisme

philosophique : le pluralisme. C'est à Canivez de dire : « cela signifie que la philosophie doit se comprendre comme théorie et pratique » (ibid., 47).

Enfin, il s'agit d'une pratique de la philosophie parce que les notes de lecture et les articles d'Éric Weil essayent d'appliquer la philosophie aux réalités sociales et politiques. Il y a pratique du dialogue non seulement entre les différentes philosophies, mais également entre les philosophies et les humanités, dans le but de développer une pratique philosophique de l'éducation. Cette éducation peut être éducation de l'homme à la raison et à la morale, mais peut se développer aussi comme éducation du citoyen à la liberté, par la compréhension philosophique de la politique (voir les textes qui font l'analyse du constitutionalisme, du parlementarisme, de la liberté de la presse, etc.). Selon Canivez, « il s'agit d'une pratique systématique de la discussion philosophique par le biais de compte rendus. […] [Les] articles sont une forme d'application, de mise en pratique de la théorie du dialogue développée dans les livres » (ibid., 49).

Canivez en fournit quelques exemples ; il développe la problématique en prenant comme matière les articles sur Machiavel, Rousseau, Marx, Malinowski, Churchill, Roosevelt, le christianisme et la politique, l'état multinational, les problèmes de l'Allemagne et de l'Union soviétique. Je retiens seulement la discussion sur le marxisme, afin de fermer le chantier ouvert en début de cette note critique. Canivez confirme l'importance donnée par Weil au marxisme et, implicitement, le propos de Sylvie Patron. Il explique la manière dont la *Philosophie politique* traite de l'alternative entre capitalisme et communisme comme des voies opposées en vue de la modernisation des sociétés : « dans les deux cas, ce passage [à la modernisation] s'est fait par la contrainte. […]. Sur le bilan économique des deux systèmes, le jugement de Weil évolue, dans les années d'après-guerre » (ibid., 64). Il va jusqu'à exprimer ses doutes quant à la nécessité d'une dictature du prolétariat : « dire que seul le communisme pouvait changer les conditions économiques de l'Empire des Tsars semble une affirmation gratuite » (Weil, cité dans ibid.) Il se peut que l'exemple actuel de la Chine prouve mieux que

l'Union soviétique la thèse de la « modernisation par la révolution » (voir Huntington 1968), qui allait faire carrière dans la science politique des années '60. Mais, en fait, cela prouve aussi que les réalités ont complètement changé, ainsi que Weil l'avait saisi lui-même : le capitalisme « ne garde que peu de traces du régime dont Marx a fait l'analyse [tandis que] le prolétariat est essentiellement différent de ce que Marx a décrit sous ce terme » (Weil, cité par ibid.). Ces passages suggèrent que le marxisme de Weil avait été surtout une attitude stratégique ayant ses raisons dans les conflits et les crises de la modernité. En effet, le marxisme s'est toujours présenté comme une solution pour le problème des conflits sociaux et comme une stratégie politique pour ceux qui n'avaient pas trouvé la reconnaissance dans l'ordre de l'Etat-nation bourgeois. La deuxième guerre mondiale avait augmenté ce sentiment ; le nazisme avait rendu le marxisme *plus* acceptable. « Cependant, les articles de *Critique* montrent qu'aux yeux d'Éric Weil, les grands hommes de l'époque sont Churchill et Roosevelt » (Canivez 2023, 60).

Dans cet esprit, je propose une sélection d'articles bons pour commencer la lecture du volume : « Churchill historien », « La vie de Roosevelt et le cours de l'histoire », « Des principes fondamentaux du parlementarisme anglais », « Pourquoi s'est apaisée la révolte ouvrière anglaise au XIXe siècle ? ». Dans ces articles on peut découvrir le pouvoir de l'esprit d'admirer et de s'émerveiller devant l'objet. En fin de compte, c'est là que la philosophie commence (comme théorie) ; et c'est toujours là qu'elle finit (comme pratique).

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