

Hannah Arendt

The Life of the Mind

1 *The world's phenomenal nature*

The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs. Nothing could appear, the word "appearance" would make no sense, if recipients of appearances did not exist—living creatures able to acknowledge, recognize, and react to—in flight or desire, approval or disapproval, blame or praise—what is not merely there but appears to them and is meant for their perception. In this world which we enter, appearing from a nowhere, and from which we disappear into a nowhere, *Being* and *Appearing coincide*. Dead matter, natural and artificial, changing and unchanging, depends in its being, that is, in its appearingness, on the presence of living creatures. Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is is meant to be perceived by somebody. Not Man but men inhabit this planet. Plurality is the law of the earth.

Since sentient beings—men and animals, to whom things appear and who as recipients guarantee their reality—are themselves also appearances, meant and able both to see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched, they are never mere subjects and can never be understood as such; they are no less "objective" than stone and bridge. The worldliness of living things means that there is no subject that is not also an object and appears as such to somebody else, who guarantees its "objective" reality. What we usually call "consciousness," the fact that I am aware of myself and therefore in a sense can appear to myself, would never suffice to guaran-

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tee reality. (Descartes' *Cogito me cogitare ergo sum* is a non sequitur for the simple reason that this *res cogitans* never appears at all unless its *cogitationes* are made manifest in sounding-out or written-down speech, which is already meant for and presupposes auditors and readers as its recipients.) Seen from the perspective of the world, every creature born into it arrives well equipped to deal with a world in which Being and Appearing coincide; they are fit for worldly existence. Living beings, men and animals, are not just in the world, they are *of the world*, and this precisely because they are subjects and objects—perceiving and being perceived—at the same time.

Nothing perhaps is more surprising in this world of ours than the almost infinite diversity of its appearances, the sheer entertainment value of its views, sounds, and smells, something that is hardly ever mentioned by the thinkers and philosophers. (Only Aristotle at least incidentally counted the life of passive enjoyment of the pleasures our bodily organs provide as among the three ways of life that can be elected by those who, not being subject to necessity, can devote themselves to the *kalon*, to what is beautiful in opposition to what is necessary and useful.) This diversity is matched by an equally astounding diverseness of sense organs among the animal species, so that what actually appears to living creatures assumes the greatest variety of form and shape: every animal species lives in a world of its own. Still, all sense-endowed creatures have appearance as such in common, first, an appearing world and second, and perhaps even more important, the fact that they themselves are appearing and disappearing creatures, that there always was a world before their arrival and there always will be a world after their departure.

To be alive means to live in a world that preceded one's own arrival and will survive one's own departure. On this level of sheer being alive, appearance and disappearance, as they follow upon each other, are the primordial events, which as such mark out time, the time span between birth and death. The finite life span allotted to each living creature determines not merely its life expectancy but also its time experience; it provides the secret prototype for all time measurements no

matter how far these then may transcend the allotted life span into past and future. Thus, the lived experience of the length of a year changes radically throughout our life. A year that to a five-year-old constitutes a full fifth of his existence must seem much longer than when it will constitute a mere twentieth or thirtieth of his time on earth. We all know how the years revolve quicker and quicker as we get older, until, with the approach of old age, they slow down again because we begin to measure them against the psychologically and somatically anticipated date of our departure. Against this clock, inherent in living beings who are born and die, stands "objective" time, according to which the length of a year never changes. This is the time of the world, and its underlying assumption—regardless of any religious or scientific beliefs—is that the world has neither beginning nor end, an assumption that seems only natural for beings who always come into a world that preceded them and will survive them.

In contrast to the inorganic thereness of lifeless matter, living beings are not mere appearances. To be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display which answers the fact of one's own appearingness. Living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them. The stage is common to all who are alive, but it *seems* different to each species, different also to each individual specimen. Seeming—the it-seems-to-me, *doket moi*—is the mode, perhaps the only possible one, in which an appearing world is acknowledged and perceived. To appear always means to seem to others, and this seeming varies according to the standpoint and the perspective of the spectators. In other words, every appearing thing acquires, by virtue of its appearingness, a kind of disguise that may indeed—but does not have to—hide or disfigure it. Seeming corresponds to the fact that every appearance, its identity notwithstanding, is perceived by a plurality of spectators.

The urge toward self-display—to respond by showing to the overwhelming effect of being shown—seems to be common to men and animals. And just as the actor depends upon stage, fellow-actors, and spectators, to make his entrance, every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the loca-

tion for its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge and recognize its existence. Seen from the viewpoint of the spectators to whom it appears and from whose view it finally disappears, each individual life, its growth and decline, is a developmental process in which an entity unfolds itself in an upward movement until all its properties are fully exposed; this phase is followed by a period of standstill—its bloom or epiphany, as it were—which in turn is succeeded by the downward movement of disintegration that is terminated by complete disappearance. There are many perspectives in which this process can be seen, examined, and understood, but our criterion for what a living thing essentially is remains the same: in everyday life as well as in scientific study, it is determined by the relatively short time span of its full appearance, its epiphany. The choice, guided by the sole criteria of completeness and perfection in appearance, would be entirely arbitrary if reality were not first of all of a phenomenal nature.

The primacy of appearance for all living creatures to whom the world appears in the mode of an it-seems-to-me is of great relevance to the topic we are going to deal with—those mental activities by which we distinguish ourselves from other animal species. For although there are great differences among these activities, they all have in common a *withdrawal* from the world as it appears and a bending back toward the self. This would cause no great problem if we were mere spectators, godlike creatures thrown into the world to look after it or enjoy it and be entertained by it, but still in possession of some other region as our natural habitat. However, we are of the world and not merely in it; we, too, are appearances by virtue of arriving and departing, of appearing and disappearing; and while we come from a nowhere, we arrive well equipped to deal with whatever appears to us and to take part in the play of the world. These properties do not vanish when we happen to be engaged in mental activities and close the eyes of our body, to use the Platonic metaphor, in order to be able to open the eyes of the mind. The two-world theory belongs among the metaphysical fallacies but it would never have been able to survive for so many centuries if it had

not so plausibly corresponded to some basic experiences. As Merleau-Ponty once put it, "I can flee being only into being,"² and since Being and Appearing coincide for men, this means that I can flee appearance only into appearance. And that does not solve the problem, for the problem concerns the fitness of thought to appear at all, and the question is whether thinking and other invisible and soundless mental activities are meant to appear or whether in fact they can never find an adequate home in the world.

2 (True) being and (mere) appearance: the two-world theory

We may find a first consoling hint regarding this subject if we turn to the old metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) Appearance, because it, too, actually relies on the primacy, or at least on the priority, of appearance. In order to find out what truly is, the philosopher must leave the world of appearances among which he is naturally and originally at home—as Parmenides did when he was carried upward, beyond the gates of night and day, to the divine way that lay "far from the beaten path of men," and as Plato did, too, in the Cave parable.³ The world of appearances is prior to whatever region the philosopher may choose as his "true" home but into which he was not born. It has always been the very appearingness of this world that suggested to the philosopher, that is, to the human mind, the notion that something must exist that is not appearance: "*Nehmen wir die Welt als Erscheinung so beweiset sie gerade zu das Dasein von Etwas das nicht Erscheinung ist*" ("If we look upon the world as appearance, it demonstrates the existence of something that is not appearance"), in the words of Kant.⁴ In other words, when the philosopher takes leave of the world given to our senses and does a turnaround (Plato's *periegōē*) to the life of the mind, he takes his clue from the former, looking for something to be revealed to him that would explain its underlying truth. This

truth—*a-létheia*, that which is disclosed (Heidegger)—can be conceived only as another “appearance,” another phenomenon originally hidden but of a supposedly higher order, thus signifying the lasting predominance of appearance. Our mental apparatus, though it can withdraw from present appearances, remains geared to Appearance. The mind, no less than the senses, in its search—Hegel’s *Anstrengung des Begriffs*—expects that something will appear to it.

Something quite similar seems to be true for science, and especially for modern science, which—according to an early remark of Marx’s—lies on Being and Appearance having parted company, so that the philosopher’s special and individual effort is no longer needed to arrive at some “truth” behind the appearances. The scientist, too, depends on appearances, whether, in order to find out what lies beneath the surface, he cuts open the visible body to look at its interior or catches hidden objects by means of all sorts of sophisticated equipment that deprives them of the exterior properties through which they show themselves to our natural senses. The guiding notion of these philosophical and scientific efforts is always the same: Appearances, as Kant said, “must themselves have grounds which are not appearances.”⁷⁰ This, in fact, is an obvious generalization of the way natural things grow and “appear” into the light of day out of a ground of darkness, except that it was now assumed that this ground possessed a higher rank of reality than what merely appeared and after a while disappeared again. And just as the philosophers’ “conceptual efforts” to find something beyond appearances have always ended with rather violent invectives against “mere appearances,” the eminently practical achievements of the scientists in laying bare what appearances themselves never show without being interfered with have been made at their expense.

The primacy of appearance is a fact of everyday life which neither the scientist nor the philosopher can ever escape, to which they must always return from their laboratories and studies, and which shows its strength by never being in the least changed or deflected by whatever they may have discovered when they withdrew from it. “Thus the ‘strange’

notions of the new physics . . . [surprise] common sense . . . without changing anything of its categories.” Against this unmistakable common-sense conviction stands the age-old theoretical supremacy of Being and Truth over mere appearance, that is, the supremacy of the *ground* that does not appear over the surface that does. This ground supposedly answers the oldest question of philosophy as well as of science: How does it happen that something or somebody, including myself, appears at all and what makes it appear in this form and shape rather than in any other? The question itself asks for a *cause* rather than a base or ground, but the point of the matter is that our tradition of philosophy has transformed the base from which something rises into the cause that produces it and has then assigned to this producing agent a higher rank of reality than is given to what merely meets the eye. The belief that a cause should be of higher rank than the effect (so that an effect can easily be dispensed with by being retraced to its cause) may belong to the oldest and most stubborn metaphysical fallacies. Yet here again we are not dealing with a sheer arbitrary error; the truth is, not only do appearances never reveal what lies beneath them of their own accord but also, generally speaking, they never just reveal; they also conceal—“No thing, no side of a thing, shows itself except by actively hiding the others.”⁷¹ They expose, and they also protect from exposure, and, as far as what lies beneath is concerned, this protection may even be their most important function. At any rate, this is true for living things, whose surface hides and protects the inner organs that are their source of life.

The elementary logical fallacy of all theories that rely on the dichotomy of Being and Appearance is obvious and was early discovered and summed up by the sophist Gorgias in a fragment from his lost treatise *On Non-Being or On Nature—supposedly a refutation of Eleatic philosophy*: “Being is not manifest since it does not appear [to men: *dokein*]; appearing [to men] is weak since it does not succeed in being.”⁷²

Modern science’s relentless search for the base underneath

can catch hold of it. But the results have been rather perplexing. No man, it has turned out, can live among "causes" or give full account in normal human language of a Being whose truth can be scientifically demonstrated in the laboratory and tested practically in the real world through technology. It does look as though Being, once made manifest, overruled appearances—except that nobody so far has succeeded in living in a world that does not manifest itself of its own accord.

3 The reversal of the metaphysical hierarchy: the value of the surface

The everyday common-sense world, which neither the scientist nor the philosopher ever eludes, knows error as well as illusion. Yet no elimination of errors or dispelling of illusions can arrive at a region beyond appearance. "For when an illusion dissipates, when an appearance suddenly breaks up, it is always for the profit of a new appearance which takes up again for its own account the ontological function of the first. . . . The disillusion is the loss of one evidence only because it is the acquisition of *another* evidence . . . there is no Schein without an *Erscheinung*."¹⁰ That modern science, in its relentless search for *the* truth behind *mere* appearances, will ever be able to resolve this predicament is, to say the least, highly doubtful, if only because the scientist himself belongs to the world of appearances although his perspective on this world may differ from the common-sense perspective.

Historically speaking, it seems that an irremovable doubt has been inherent in the whole enterprise ever since its beginnings with the rise of science in the modern age. The first entirely new notion brought in by the new age—the seventeenth-century idea of an unlimited *progress*, which after a few centuries became the most cherished dogma of all men living in a scientifically oriented world—seems intended to take care of the predicament; though one expects to progress further and

further, no one seems ever to have believed in reaching a final absolute goal of truth.

It is obvious that consciousness of the predicament should be most acute in the sciences that deal directly with men, and the answer—reduced to its lowest common denominator—of the various branches of biology, sociology, and psychology is to interpret all appearances as functions of the life process. The great advantage of functionalism is that it presents us again with a unitary world view, and the old metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) Appearance, together with the old prejudice of Being's supremacy over appearance, is still kept intact, albeit in a different manner. The argument has shifted: appearances are no longer depreciated as "secondary qualities" but understood as necessary conditions for essential processes that go on inside the living organism.

This hierarchy has recently been challenged in a way that seems to me highly significant. Could it not be that appearances are not there for the sake of the life process but, on the contrary, that the life process is there for the sake of appearances? Since we live in an *appearing* world, is it not much more plausible that the relevant and the meaningful in this world of ours should be located precisely on the surface?

In a number of publications on the various shapes and forms in animal life, the Swiss zoologist and biologist Adolf Portmann has shown that the facts themselves speak a very different language from the simplistic functional hypothesis that holds that appearances in living beings serve merely the two-fold purpose of self-preservation and preservation of the species. From a different and, as it were, more innocent viewpoint, it rather looks as though, on the contrary, the inner, non-appearing organs exist only in order to bring forth and maintain the appearances. "Prior to all functions for the purpose of preservation of the individual and the species . . . we find the simple fact of appearing as self-display that makes these functions *meaningful*" (italics added).¹¹

Moreover, Portmann demonstrates with a great wealth of fascinating example, what should be obvious to the naked eye—that the enormous variety of animal and plant life, the very richness of display in its sheer functional *superfluity*,

cannot be accounted for by the common theories that understand life in terms of functionality. Thus, the plumage of birds, "which, at first, we consider to be of value as a warm, protective covering, is thus in addition so formed that its visible parts—and these only—build up a coloured garment, the intrinsic worth of which lies solely in its visible appearance."¹² Generally speaking, "the functional form pure and simple, so much extolled by some as befitting Nature [adequate to nature's purpose], is a rare and special case."¹³ Hence, it is wrong to take into account only the functional process that goes on inside the living organism and to regard everything that is outside and "offers itself to the senses as the more or less subordinate consequence of the much more essential, 'central,' and 'real' processes."¹⁴ According to that prevailing misinterpretation, "the external shape of the animal serves to conserve the essential, the inside apparatus, through movement and intake of food, avoidance of enemies, and finding sexual partners."¹⁵ Against this approach Portmann proposes his "morphology," a new science that would reverse the priorities: "Not what something is, but how it 'appears' is the research problem" (italics added).¹⁶

This means that the very shape of an animal "must be appraised as a special organ of reference in relationship to a beholding eye. . . . The eye and what is to be looked at form a functional unit which is fitted together according to rules as strict as those obtaining between food and digestive organs."¹⁷ And in accordance with this reversal, Portmann distinguishes between "authentic appearances," which come to light of their own accord, and "inauthentic" ones, such as the roots of a plant or the inner organs of an animal, which become visible only through interference with and violation of the "authentic" appearance.

Two facts of equal importance give this reversal its main plausibility. First, the impressive phenomenal difference between "authentic" and "inauthentic" appearances, between outside shapes and the inside apparatus. The outside shapes are infinitely varied and highly differentiated; among the higher animals we can usually tell one individual from another. Outside features of living things, moreover, are arranged

according to the law of symmetry so that they appear in a definite and pleasing order. Inside organs, on the contrary, are never pleasing to the eye; once forced into view, they look as though they had been thrown together piecemeal and, unless deformed by disease or some peculiar abnormality, they appear alike; not even the various animal species, let alone the individuals, are easy to tell from each other by the mere inspection of their intestines. When Portmann defines life as "the appearance of an inside in an outside," is he seems to fall victim to the very views he criticizes; for the point of his own findings is that what appears outside is so hopelessly different from the inside that one can hardly say that the inside ever appears at all. The inside, the functional apparatus of the life process, is covered up by an outside which, as far as the life process is concerned, has only one function, namely, to hide and protect it, to prevent its exposure to the light of an appearing world. If this inside were to appear, we would all look alike.

There is, second, the equally impressive evidence for the existence of an innate impulse—no less compelling than the merely functional instinct of preservation—which Portmann calls "the urge to self-display" (*Selbstdarstellung*). This instinct is entirely gratuitous in terms of life-preservation; it far transcends what may be deemed necessary for sexual attraction. These findings suggest that the predominance of outside appearance implies, in addition to the sheer receptivity of our senses, a spontaneous activity: *whatever can see wants to be seen, whatever can hear calls out to be heard, whatever can touch presents itself to be touched*. It is indeed as though everything that is alive—in addition to the fact that its surface is made for appearance, fit to be seen and meant to appear to others—has an *urge to appear*, to fit itself into the world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its "inner self" but itself as an individual. (The word "self-display," like the German *Selbstdarstellung*, is equivocal; it can mean that I actively make my presence felt, seen, and heard, or that I display my self, something inside me that otherwise would not appear at all—that is, in Portmann's terminology, an "inauthentic" appearance. In the following we shall use the word in

the first meaning.) It is precisely this self-display, quite prominent already in the higher forms of animal life, that reaches its climax in the human species.

Portmann's morphological reversal of the usual priorities has far-reaching consequences, which he himself, however—perhaps for very good reasons—does not elaborate. They point to what he calls “the value of the surface,” that is, to the fact that “the appearance shows a maximum power of expression compared with the internal, whose functions are of a more primitive order.”¹⁹ The use of the word “expression” shows clearly the terminological difficulties an elaboration of these consequences is bound to encounter. For an “expression” can not but express something, and to the inevitable question, What does the expression express? (that is, press out), the answer will always be: something inside—an idea, a thought, an emotion. The expressiveness of an appearance, however, is of a different order; it “expresses” nothing but itself, that is, it exhibits or displays. It follows from Portmann's findings that our habitual standards of judgment, so firmly rooted in metaphysical assumptions and prejudices—according to which the essential lies beneath the surface, and the surface is “superficial”—are wrong, that our common conviction that what is inside ourselves, our “inner life,” is more relevant to what we “are” than what appears on the outside is an illusion; but when it comes to correcting these fallacies, it turns out that our language, or at least our terminological discourse, fails us.

Besides, the difficulties are far from being merely terminological. They are intimately related to the problematic beliefs we hold with regard to our psychic life and the relationship of soul and body. To be sure, we are inclined to agree that no bodily inside ever appears authentically, of its own accord, but if we speak of an inner life that is expressed in outward appearance, we mean the life of the soul; the inside-outside relation, itself, is far from being merely terminological.

true for our bodies, is not true for our souls, even though we speak of our psychic life and its location “inside” ourselves in metaphors obviously drawn from bodily data and experiences. The same use of metaphors, moreover, is characteristic of our conceptual language, designed to make manifest the life of the mind; the words we use in strictly philosophical discourse are also invariably derived from expressions originally related to the world as given to our five bodily senses, from whose experience they then, as Locke pointed out, are “transferred”—metaphorically, carried over—to more abstruse significations, and made to stand for ideas that come not under the cognizance of our senses.” Only by means of such transference could men “conceive those operations they experimented in themselves, which made no outward sensible appearances.”²⁰ Locke relies here on the old tacit assumption of an identity of soul and mind, both being opposed to the body by virtue of their invisibility.

Upon closer examination, however, it turns out that what is true for the mind, namely, that metaphorical language is the only way it has to make an “outward sensible appearance”—even silent, non-appearing activity already consists in speech, the soundless dialogue of me with myself—is not at all true for the life of the soul. Conceptual metaphorical speech is indeed adequate to the activity of thinking, the operations of our mind, but the life of our soul in its very intensity is much more adequately expressed in a glance, a sound, a gesture, than in speech. What becomes manifest when we speak about psychic experiences is never the experience itself but whatever we *think* about it when we reflect upon it. Unlike thoughts and ideas, feelings, passions, and emotions can no more become part and parcel of the world of appearances than can our inner organs. What appears in the outside world in addition to physical signs is only what we make of them through the operation of thought. Every *show* of anger, as distinct from the anger I feel, already contains a reflection on it, and it is this reflection that gives the emotion the highly individualized form which is meaningful for all surface phenomena. To show one's anger is one form of self-presentation: I decide what is fit for appearance. In other words, the emotions

I feel are no more *meant* to be shown in their unadulterated state than the inner organs by which we live. To be sure, I could never transform them into appearances if they did not prompt it; and if I did not feel them as I do other sensations that make me aware of the life process within me. But the way they become manifest without the intervention of reflection and transference into speech—by glance, gesture, inarticulate sound—is no different from the way the higher animal species communicate very similar emotions to each other as well as to men.

Our mental activities, by contrast, are conceived in speech even before being communicated, but speech is meant to be heard and words are meant to be understood by others who also have the ability to speak, just as a creature endowed with the sense of vision is meant to see and to be seen. Thought without speech is inconceivable; "thought and speech anticipate one another. They continually take one another's place";²¹ they actually take each other for granted. And although the power of speech can be physically located with greater assurance than many emotions—love or hatred, shame or envy—the locus is not an "organ" and lacks all the strictly functional properties that are so characteristic of the whole organic life process. It is true that all mental activities withdraw from the world of appearances, but this withdrawal is not toward an interior of either the self or the soul. Thought with its accompanying conceptual language, since it occurs in and is spoken by a being at home in a world of appearances, stands in need of metaphors in order to bridge the gap between a world given to sense experience and a realm where no such immediate apprehension of evidence can ever exist. But our soul-experiences are body-bound to such an extent that to speak of an "inner life" of the soul is as unmetaphorical as to speak of an inner sense thanks to which we have clear sensations of the functioning or non-functioning of our inner organs. It is obvious that a mindless creature cannot possess anything like an experience of personal identity; it is at the complete mercy of its inner life processes, its moods and emotions, whose continual change is in no way different from the continual change of our bodily organs. Every emotion is

a somatic experience; my heart aches when I am grieved,²² gets warm with sympathy, opens itself up in rare moments when love or joy overwhelms me, and similar physical sensations take possession of me with anger, wrath, envy, and other affects. The language of the soul in its mere expressive stage, prior to its transformation and transfiguration through thought, is not metaphorical; it does not depart from the senses and uses no analogies when it talks in terms of physical sensations. Merleau-Ponty, to my knowledge the only philosopher who not only tried to give an account of the organic structure of human existence but also tried in all earnest to embark upon a "philosophy of the flesh," was still misled by the old identification of mind and soul when he defined "the mind as the other side of the body" since "there is a body of the mind, and a mind of the body and a chasm between them."²³ Precisely the lack of such chiasmata or crossings over is the crux of mental phenomena, and Merleau-Ponty himself, in a different context, recognized the lack with great clarity. Thought, he writes, is "fundamental because it is not borne by anything but not fundamental as if with it one reached a foundation upon which one ought to base oneself and stay. As a matter of principle, fundamental thought is bottomless. It is, if you wish, an abyss."²⁴ But what is true of the mind is not true of the soul and vice versa. The soul, though perhaps much darker than the mind will ever manage to be, is not bottomless; it does indeed "overflow" into the body; it "encroaches upon it, is hidden in it—and at the same time needs it, terminates in it, is anchored in it."²⁵

Such insights, incidentally, into the forever troublesome body-soul problem are very old. Aristotle's *De Anima* is full of tantalizing hints at psychic phenomena and their close interconnection with the body in contrast with the relation of, rather, non-relation between body and mind. Discussing these matters in a rather tentative and uncharacteristic way, Aristotle declares: ". . . there seems to be no case in which the soul can act or be acted upon without the body, e.g., anger, courage, appetite, and sensation generally. [To be active without involving the body] seems rather a property of the mind [*noein*]. But if the mind [*noein*] too proves to be some imagination

[phantasts] or impossible without imagination, it [noein] too could not be without the body.²³ And somewhat later, summing up: "Nothing is evident about the mind [*nous*] and the theoretical faculty, but it seems to be a different kind of soul, and only this kind can be separated [from the body], as what is eternal from what is perishable."²⁴ And in one of the biological treatises he suggests that the soul—its vegetative as well as its nutritive and sensitive part—"came into being in the embryo without existing previously outside it, but the nous entered the soul from outside, thus granting to man a kind of activity which had no connection with the activities of the body."²⁵ In other words, there are no sensations corresponding to mental activities; and the sensations of the psyche, of the soul, are actually feelings we sense with our bodily organs.

In addition to the urge toward self-display by which living things fit themselves into a world of appearances, men also present themselves in deed and word and thus indicate how they wish to appear, what in their opinion is fit to be seen and what is not. This element of deliberate choice in what to show and what to hide seems specifically human. Up to a point we can choose how to appear to others, and this appearance is by no means the outward manifestation of an inner disposition; if it were, we probably would all act and speak alike. Here, too, we owe to Aristotle the crucial distinctions. "What is spoken out," he says, "are symbols of affects in the soul, and what is written down are symbols of spoken words. As writing, so also is speech not the same for all. That however of what these primarily are symbols, the affections [pathēmata] of the soul, are the same for all." These affections are "naturally" expressed by "inarticulate noises [which] also reveal something, for instance, those made by animals." Distinction and individuation occur through speech, the use of verbs and nouns, and these are not products or "symbols" of the soul but . . . thoughts [noémasin]" (italics added).²⁶

If the inner psychic ground of our individual appearance were not always the same, there could be no science of psychology which qua science relies on a psychic "inside we are

all alike,"²⁷ just as the science of physiology and medicine relies on the sameness of our inner organs. Psychology, depth psychology or psychoanalysis, discovers no more than the ever-changing moods, the ups and downs of our psychic life, and its results and discoveries are neither particularly appealing nor very meaningful in themselves. "Individual psychology," on the other hand, the prerogative of fiction, the novel, and the drama, can never be a science; as a science it is a contradiction in terms. When modern science finally began to illuminate the Biblical "darkness of the human heart"—of which Augustine said: "*Latet cor bonum, latet cor malum, abyssus est in corde bono et in corde malo*" ("Hidden is the good heart, hidden is the evil heart, an abyss is in the good heart and in the evil heart")²⁸—it turned out to be "a motley-colored and painful storehouse and treasure of evils," as Democritus already suspected.²⁹ Or to put it in a somewhat more positive way: "*Das Gefüll ist herrlich, wenn es im Grunde bleibt; nicht aber wenn es an den Tag tritt, sich zum Wesen machen und herrschen will!*" ("The emotions are glorious when they stay in the depths, but not when they come forth into the day and wish to become of the essence and to rule").³⁰

The monotonous sameness and pervasive ugliness so highly characteristic of the findings of modern psychology, and contrasting so obviously with the enormous variety and richness of overt human conduct, witness to the radical difference between the inside and outside of the human body. The passions and emotions of our soul are not only body-bound, they seem to have the same life-sustaining and preserving functions as our inner organs, with which they also share the fact that only disorder or abnormality can individualize them. Without the sexual urge, arising out of our reproductive organs, love would not be possible; but while the urge is always the same, how great is the variety in the actual appearances of love! To be sure, one may understand love as the sublimation of sex if only one keeps in mind that there would be nothing that we understand as sex without it, and that without some intervention of the mind, that is, without a deliberate choice between what pleases and what displeases, not even the selection of a sexual partner would be possible. Similarly fear is an emotion

indispensable for survival; it indicates danger, and without that warning sense no living thing could last long. The courageous man is not one whose soul lacks this emotion or who can overcome it once and for all, but one who has decided that fear is not what he wants to show. Courage can then become second nature or a habit but not in the sense that fearlessness replaces fear, as though it, too, could become an emotion. Such choices are determined by various factors; many of them are predetermined by the culture into which we are born—they are made because we wish to please others. But there are also choices not inspired by our environment; we may make them because we wish to please ourselves or because we wish to set an example, that is, to persuade others to be pleased with what pleases us. Whatever the motives may be, success and failure in the enterprise of self-presentation depend on the consistency and duration of the image thereby presented to the world.

Since appearances always present themselves in the guise of seeming, pretense and willful deception on the part of the performer, error and illusion on the part of the spectator are, inevitably, among the inherent potentialities. Self-presentation is distinguished from self-display by the active and conscious choice of the image shown; self-display has no choice but to show whatever properties a living being possesses. Self-presentation would not be possible without a degree of self-awareness—a capability inherent in the reflexive character of mental activities and clearly transcending mere consciousness, which we probably share with the higher animals. Only self-presentation is open to hypocrisy and pretense, properly speaking, and the only way to tell pretense and make-believe from reality and truth is the former's failure to endure and remain consistent. It has been said that hypocrisy is the compliment vice pays to virtue, but this is not quite true. All virtue begins with a compliment paid to it, by which I express my being pleased with it. The compliment implies a promise to the world, to those to whom I appear, to act in accordance with my pleasure, and it is the breaking of the implied promise that characterizes the hypocrite. In other words, the hypocrite is not a villain who is pleased with vice and hides his pleasure

from his surroundings. The test applying to the hypocrite is indeed the old Socratic "Be as you wish to appear," which means appear *always* as you wish to appear to others even if it happens that you are alone and appear to no one but yourself. When I make such a decision, I am not merely reacting to whatever qualities may be given me; I am making an act of deliberate choice among the various potentialities of conduct with which the world has presented me. Out of such acts arises finally what we call character or personality, the conglomeration of a number of identifiable qualities gathered together into a comprehensible and reliably identifiable whole, and imprinted, as it were, on an unchangeable substratum of gifts and defects peculiar to our soul and body structure. Because of the undeniable relevance of these self-chosen properties to our appearance and role in the world, modern philosophy, starting with Hegel, has succumbed to the strange illusion that man, in distinction from other things, has created himself. Obviously, self-presentation and the sheer thereness of existence are not the same.

5 Appearance and semblance

Since choice as the decisive factor in self-presentation has to do with appearances, and since appearance has the double function of concealing some interior and revealing some "sur-face"—for instance of concealing fear and revealing courage, that is, hiding the fear by showing courage—there is always the possibility that what appears may by disappearing turn out finally to be a mere semblance. Because of the gap between inside and outside, between the ground of appearance and appearance—or to put it differently, no matter how different and individualized we appear and how deliberately we have chosen this individuality—it always remains true that "inside we are all alike," unchangeable except at the cost of the very functioning of our inner psychic and bodily organs or, conversely, of an intervention undertaken to remove some dys-

function. Hence, there is always an element of semblance in all appearance: the ground itself does not appear. From this it does not follow that all appearances are mere semblances. Semblances are possible only in the midst of appearances; they presuppose appearance as error presupposes truth. Error is the price we pay for truth, and semblance is the price we pay for the wonders of appearance. Error and semblance are closely connected phenomena; they correspond with each other.

Semblance is inherent in a world ruled by the twofold law of appearing to a plurality of sensitive creatures each equipped with the faculties of perception. Nothing that appears manifests itself to a single viewer capable of perceiving it under all its inherent aspects. The world appears in the mode of it-seems-to-me, depending on particular perspectives determined by location in the world as well as by particular organs of perception. This mode not only produces error, which I can correct by changing my location, drawing closer to what appears, or by improving my organs of perception with the help of tools and implements, or by using my imagination to take other perspectives into account; it also gives birth to true semblances, that is, to deceptive appearance, which I cannot correct like an error since they are caused by my permanent location on the earth and remain bound up with my own existence as one of the earth's appearances. "Semblance" (*dokos*, from *doket* *moi*), said Xenophanes, "is wrought over all things," so that "there is no man, nor will there ever be one who knows clearly about the gods and about everything I speak of; for even if someone should chance to say what appears in its total reality, he himself would not know it."³⁴

Following Portmann's distinction between authentic and inauthentic appearances, one would like to speak of authentic and inauthentic semblances: the latter, mirages like some Fata Morgana, will dissolve of their own accord or can be dispelled upon closer inspection; the former, on the contrary, like the movement of the sun, its rise in the morning and setting in the evening, will not yield to any amount of scientific information, because that is the way the appearance of sun and earth inevitably seems to an earth-bound creature that cannot change its abode. Here we are dealing with those "nat-

ural and unavoidable illusions" of our sense apparatus to which Kant referred in his introduction to the transcendental dialectic of reason. The illusion in transcendent judgment he called "natural and unavoidable," because it was "inseparable from human reason, and . . . even after its deceptiveness has been exposed, will not cease to play tricks with reason and continually entrap it into momentary aberrations ever and again calling for correction."³⁵

That natural and inevitable semblances are inherent in a world of appearances from which we can never escape is perhaps the strongest, certainly the most plausible, argument against the simple-minded positivism that believes it has found a firm ground of certainty if it only excludes all mental phenomena from consideration and holds fast to observable facts, the everyday reality given to our senses. All living creatures, capable both of receiving appearance through sense organs and displaying themselves as appearances, are subject to authentic illusions, which are by no means the same for each species but connected with the form and mode of their specific life process. Animals are also able to produce semblances—quite a number of them can even counterfeit a physical appearance—and men and animals both possess an innate ability to manipulate appearance for the sake of deception. To uncover the "true" identity of an animal behind its adaptive temporary color is not unlike the unmasking of the hypocrite. But what then appears under a deceptive surface is not an inside self, an authentic appearance, changeless and reliable in its thereness. The uncovering destroys a deception; it does not discover anything authentically appearing. An "inside self," if it exists at all, never appears to either the inner or the outward sense, since none of the inner data possess stable, relatively permanent features which, being recognizable and identifiable, characterize individual appearance. "No fixed and abiding self can present itself in this flux of inner appearances," as Kant observed repeatedly.³⁶ Actually it is misleading to speak even of inner "appearances"; all we know are inner sensations whose relentless succession prevents any of them from assuming a lasting, identifiable shape. ("For where, when, and how has there ever been a vision of the inside? . . . The 'psychism' is

opaque to itself.”³⁸) Emotions and “inner sensations” are “unworldly” in that they lack the chief worldly property of “standing still and remaining” at least long enough to be clearly perceived—and not merely sensed—to be intuited, identified, and acknowledged; again according to Kant, “time, the only form of inner intuition, has nothing permanent.”³⁹ In other words, when Kant speaks of time as the “form of inner intuition,” he speaks, though without being aware of it, metaphorically, and he draws his metaphor from our spatial experiences, which have to do with outside appearances. It is precisely the absence of form and hence of any possibility of intuition that characterizes our experience of inner sensations. In inner experience, the only thing to hold onto, to distinguish something at least resembling reality from the incessantly passing moods of our psyche, is persistent repetition. In extreme cases repetition can become so persistent that it results in the unbroken permanence of one mood, one sensation; but this invariably indicates a grave disorder of the psyche, the euphoria of the maniac or the depression of the melancholic.

6 *The thinking ego and the self: Kant*

In the work of no other philosopher has the concept of appearance, and hence of semblance (of *Erscheinung* and *Schein*), played so decisive and central a role as in Kant. His notion of a “thing in itself,” something which is but does not appear although it causes appearances, can be, and has been, explained on the grounds of the theological tradition: God is “something”; He is “not nothing.” God can be thought, but only as that which does not appear, is not given to our experience, hence is “in itself,” and, as He does not appear, He is not *for us*. This interpretation has its difficulties. For Kant, God is an “Idea of reason” and as such *for us*: to think God and speculate about a hereafter is, according to Kant, inherent in human thought insofar as reason, man’s speculative capacity, necessarily transcends the cognitive faculties of his intellect:

only what appears and, in the mode of it-seems-to-me, is given to experience can be known; but thoughts also “are,” and certain thought-things, which Kant calls “ideas,” though never given to experience and therefore unknowable, such as God, freedom, and immortality, are *for us* in the emphatic sense that reason cannot help thinking them and that they are of the greatest interest to men and the life of the mind. It may therefore be advisable to examine to what extent the notion of a non-appearing “thing in itself” is given in the very understanding of the world as a world of appearances, regardless of the needs and assumptions of a thinking being and of the life of the mind.

There is first the everyday fact—rather than Kant’s conclusion mentioned above (page 24)—that every living thing because it appears possesses a “ground which is not appearance” but which can be forced to the light of day and then becomes what Portmann called an “inauthentic appearance.” To be sure, in Kant’s understanding, things that do not appear of their own accord but whose existence can be demonstrated—appearances. Still, his conclusion that appearances “must themselves have grounds which are not appearances” and therefore must “rest upon a transcendent object” which determines them as mere representations,⁴⁰ as that is, upon something which in principle is of an altogether different ontological order, seems clearly drawn in analogy to phenomena of this world, which contains both authentic and inauthentic appearances, and in which the inauthentic appearances, insofar as they contain the very apparatus of the life process, seem to cause the authentic ones. The theological bias (in Kant’s case the need to make the arguments favor the existence of an intelligible world) enters here in the word “*mere* representations”—as though he had forgotten his own central thesis: “We assert that the conditions of the *possibility of experience* in general are likewise conditions of the *possibility of the objects of experience*, and that for this reason they have objective validity in a synthetic *a priori* judgment.”⁴¹ The plausibility of Kant’s argument, that what causes something to appear must be of a different order from the appearance itself, rests on our ex-

pentence with these life phenomena, but the hierarchical order between the "transcendent object" (the thing in itself) and "mere representations" does not, and it is this order of priorities that Fottmann's thesis reverses. Kant was carried away by his great desire to shore up each and every argument which, without being able to arrive at a definite proof, may at least make it overwhelmingly plausible that "there undoubtedly is something distinct from the world which contains the ground of the order of the world,"⁴¹ and therefore is itself of a higher order. If we trust only our experiences with appearing and non-appearing things and start speculating on the same lines, we can just as well, actually with much stronger plausibility, conclude that there may indeed exist a fundamental ground behind an appearing world, but that this ground's chief and even sole significance lies in its effects, that is, in what it causes to appear, rather than in its sheer creativity. If the divine is what causes appearances and does not appear itself, then man's inner organs could turn out to be his true divinities.

In other words, the common philosophical understanding of Being as the ground of Appearance is true to the phenomenon of Life, but the same cannot be said of the evaluation of Being *versus* Appearance which is at the bottom of all two-world theories. That traditional hierarchy arises not from our ordinary experiences with the world of appearances, but, rather, from the not-at-all ordinary experience of the thinking ego. As we shall see later, the experience transcends not only Appearance but Being as well. Kant himself explicitly identifies the phenomenon that gave him the actual basis for his belief in a "thing in itself" behind "mere" appearances. It was the fact that "in the consciousness of myself in the sheer thinking activity [*beim bloßen Denken*], I am the thing itself [*das Wesen selbst*, i.e., *das Ding an sich*] although nothing of myself is thereby given for thought."⁴² If I reflect on the relation of me to myself obtaining in the thinking activity, it may well seem as though my thoughts were "mere representations" or manifestations of an ego that itself remains forever concealed, for thoughts of course are never anything like properties that can be predicated of a self or a person. The thinking ego is indeed Kant's "thing in itself": it does not appear to others

and, unlike the self of self-awareness, it does not appear to itself, and yet it is "not nothing."

The thinking ego is sheer activity and therefore ageless, sexless, without qualities, and without a life story. Etienne Gilson, asked to write his autobiography, responded: "A man of seventy-five should have many things to say about his past, but . . . if he has lived only as a philosopher, he immediately realizes that he has no past."⁴³ For the thinking ego is not the self. There is an incidental remark—one of those on which we are so dependent in our inquiry—in Thomas Aquinas that sounds rather mysterious unless we are aware of this distinction between the thinking ego and the self: "My soul [in Thomas the organ for thought] is not I; and if only souls are saved, I am not saved, nor is any man."⁴⁴

The inner sense that might let us get hold of the thinking activity in some sort of inner intuition has nothing to hold on to, according to Kant, because its manifestations are utterly unlike "the appearance confronting external sense [which finds] something still and remaining . . . while time, the only form of inner intuition, has nothing permanent."⁴⁵ Hence, "I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am. This representation is a *thought*, not an *intuition*." And he adds in a footnote: "The I think expresses the act of determining my existence. Existence is already given thereby, but the mode in which I am . . . is not thereby given."⁴⁶ Kant stresses the point repeatedly in the *Critique of Pure Reason*—nothing permanent "is given in inner intuition insofar as I think myself"⁴⁷—but we will do better to turn to his pre-critical writings to find an actual description of the sheer experiences of the thinking ego.

In the *Träume eines Geisteslers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1768), Kant stresses the "immateriality" of the *nundus intelligibilis*, the world in which the thinking ego moves, in contrast to the "inertia and constancy" of dead matter that surrounds living beings in the world of appearances. In this context, he distinguishes between the "notion the soul of man has of itself as mind [Geist] through an immaterial intuition, and the consciousness through which it presents itself as a man by means of an image having its source in the

sensation of physical organs and conceived in relation to material things. It is, therefore, indeed always the same subject that is both a member of the visible and the invisible world, but not the same person, since . . . what I as mind think is not remembered by me as man, and, conversely, my actual state as man does not enter my notion of myself as mind." And he speaks in a strange footnote of a "certain double personality which belongs to the soul even in this life"; he compares the state of the thinking ego to the state of sound sleep "when the external senses are completely at rest." The ideas in sleep, he suspects, "may be clearer and broader than the very clearest in the waking state," precisely because "man, at such times, is not sensible of his body." And of these ideas, on waking up, we remember nothing. Dreams are something still different; they "do not belong here. For then man does not wholly sleep . . . and weaves the actions of his mind into the impressions of the external senses."⁴⁵

These notions of Kant's, if understood as constituting a dream theory, are patently absurd. But they are interesting as a rather awkward attempt to account for the mind's experiences of withdrawal from the real world. Because an account does have to be given of an activity that, unlike any other activity or action, never meets the resistance of matter. It is not even hindered or slowed down by sounding out in words, which are formed by sense organs. The experience of the activity of thought is probably the aboriginal source of our notion of spirituality in itself, regardless of the forms it has assumed. Psychologically speaking, one of the outstanding characteristics of thought is its incomparable *swiftness*—"swift as a thought," said Homer, and Kant in his early writings speaks repeatedly of the *Hurtigkeit des Gedankens*.⁴⁶ Thought is swift, clearly, because it is immaterial, and this in turn goes a long way toward explaining the hostility of so many of the great metaphysicians to their own bodies. From the viewpoint of the thinking ego, the body is nothing but an obstacle.

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tence Kant was the first to discover, to clarify, and dispel. It seems only proper that this fallacy, like most of the others that have afflicted the tradition of philosophy, should have its source in the experiences of the thinking ego. This one, at any rate, bears an obvious resemblance to a simpler and more common one, mentioned by P. F. Strawson in an essay on Kant: "It is, indeed, an old belief that reason is something essentially out of time and yet in us. Doubtless it has its ground in the fact that . . . we grasp [mathematical and logical] truths. But . . . [one] who grasps timeless truths [need not] himself be timeless."⁴⁷ It is characteristic of the Oxford school of criticism to understand these fallacies as logical non sequiturs—as though philosophers throughout the centuries had been, for reasons unknown, just a bit too stupid to discover the elementary flaws in their arguments. The truth of the matter is that elementary logical mistakes are quite rare in the history of philosophy; what appear to be errors in logic to minds disengaged from questions that have been uncritically dismissed as "meaningless" are usually caused by semblances, unavoidable for beings whose whole existence is determined by appearance. Hence, in our context the only relevant question is whether the semblances are inauthentic or authentic ones, whether they are caused by dogmatic beliefs and arbitrary assumptions, mere mirages that disappear upon closer inspection, or whether they are inherent in the paradoxical condition of a living being that, though itself part of the world of appearances, is in possession of a faculty, the ability to think, that permits the mind to withdraw from the world without ever being able to leave it or transcend it.

7 Reality and the thinking ego: the Cartesian doubt and the *sensus communis*

Reality in a world of appearances is first of all characterized by "standing still and remaining" the same long enough to become an object for acknowledgment and recognition by a

subject. Husserl's basic and greatest discovery takes up in exhaustive detail the intentionality of all acts of consciousness, that is, the fact that no subjective act is ever without an object: though the seen tree may be an illusion, for the act of seeing it is an object nevertheless; though the dreamt-of landscape is visible only to the dreamer, it is the object of his dream. Objectivity is built into the very subjectivity of consciousness by virtue of intentionality. Conversely and with the same justness, one may speak of the intentionality of appearances and their built-in subjectivity. All objects because they appear indicate a subject, and, just as every subjective act has its intentional object, so every appearing object has its intentional subject. In Portmann's words, every appearance is a "conveyance for receivers" (*Sendung für Empfängersubjekte*). Whatever appears is meant for a perceiver, a potential subject no less inherent in all objectivity than a potential object is inherent in the subjectivity of every intentional act.

That appearance always demands spectators and thus implies an at least potential recognition and acknowledgement has far-reaching consequences for what we, appearing beings in a world of appearances, understand by reality, our own as well as that of the world. In both cases, our "perceptual faith,"⁵¹ as Merleau-Ponty has called it, our certainty that what we perceive has an existence independent of the act of perceiving, depends entirely on the object's also appearing as such to others and being acknowledged by them. Without this tacit acknowledgment by others we would not even be able to put faith in the way we appear to ourselves.

This is why all solipsistic theories—whether they radically claim that nothing but the self "exists" or, more moderately, hold that the self and its consciousness of itself are the primary objects of verifiable knowledge—are out of tune with the most elementary data of our existence and experience. Solipsism, open or veiled, with or without qualifications, has been the most persistent and, perhaps, the most pernicious fallacy of philosophy even before it attained in Descartes the high rank of theoretical and existential consistency. When the philosopher speaks of "man," he has in mind neither the species-being (the *Gattungswesen*, like horse or lion, which, according to

Marx, constitutes man's fundamental existence) nor a mere paradigm of what, in the philosopher's view, all men should strive to emulate. To the philosopher, speaking out of the experience of the thinking ego, man is quite naturally not just word but *thought made flesh*, the always mysterious, never fully elucidated incarnation of the thinking capability. And the trouble with this fictitious being is that it is neither the product of a diseased brain nor one of the easily dispelled "errors of the past," but the entirely authentic semblance of the thinking activity itself. For while, for whatever reason, a man indulges in sheer thinking, and no matter on what subject, he lives completely in the singular, that is, in complete solitude, as though not men but Man inhabited the earth. Descartes himself explained and justified his radical subjectivism by the decisive loss of certainties entailed by the great scientific discoveries of the modern age, and I have, in a different context, followed up Descartes' reasoning.⁵² However, when—beset by the doubts inspired by the beginnings of modern science—he decided "à repter la terre mouvante et le sable pour trouver le roc ou l'argile" ("to reject the quicksand and mud in order to find the rock or clay"), he certainly rediscovered rather familiar territory in withdrawing to a place where he could live "*aussi solitaire et retiré que dans les déserts les plus écartés*" ("as solitary and retired as in the most remote deserts").⁵³ Withdrawal from the "beastliness of the multitude" into the company of the "very few"⁵⁴ but also into the absolute solitude of the One has been the most outstanding feature of the philosopher's life ever since Parmenides and Plato discovered that for those "very few," the *sophoi*, the "life of thinking" that knows neither joy nor grief is the most divine of all, and *nous*, thought itself, is "the king of heaven and earth."⁵⁵

Descartes, true to the radical subjectivism that was the philosophers' first reaction to the new glories of science, no longer ascribed the gratifications of this way of life to the objects of thinking—the everlastingness of the *kosmos* that neither comes into being nor ever vanishes from it and thus gives those few who have decided to spend their lives as its spectators their share of immortality. His very modern suspicion of man's cognitive and sensory apparatus made him define with greater

clarity than anyone before him as properties of the *res cogitans* certain characteristics that were by no means unknown to the ancients but that now, perhaps for the first time, assumed a paramount importance. Outstanding among these was self-sufficiency, namely, that this ego has "no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing," and, next, worldlessness, namely, that in self-inspection, "examinant avec attention ce que j'étais," he could easily "feindre que je n'acuis aucun corps et qu'il n'y avait aucun monde ni aucun lieu où je fusse" ("feign that I had no body, and that there was no world nor place where I would be").⁵⁶

To be sure, none of these discoveries, or, rather, re-discoveries, was of great importance in itself to Descartes. His main concern was to find something—the thinking ego or, in his words, "*la chose pensante*," which he equated with the soul—whose reality was beyond suspicion, beyond the illusions of sense perception: even the power of an all-powerful *Dieu trompeur* would not be able to shatter the certainty of a consciousness that had withdrawn from all sense experience. Although everything given may be illusion and dream, the dreamer, if he will only consent not to demand reality of the dream, must be real. Hence, "*Je pense, donc je suis*," "I think, therefore I am." So strong was the experience of the thinking activity itself, on the one hand, so passionate on the other the desire to find certainty and some sort of abiding permanence after the new science had discovered "*la terre morteante*" (the shifting quicksand of the very ground on which we stand), that it never occurred to him that no *cogitation* and no *cogito me cogitare*, no consciousness of an acting self that had suspended all faith in the reality of its intentional objects, would ever have been able to convince him of his own reality had he actually been born in a desert, without a body and its senses to perceive "material" things and without fellow-creatures to assure him that what he perceived was perceived by them too. The Cartesian *res cogitans*, this fictitious creature, bodiless, senseless, and forsaken, would not even know that there is such a thing as reality and a possible distinction between the real and the unreal, between the common world of waking life and the private non-world of our dreams. What Merleau-Ponty had to say against

Descartes is brilliantly right: "To reduce perception to the thought of perceiving . . . is to take out an insurance against doubt whose premiums are more onerous than the loss for which it is to indemnify us: for it is to . . . move to a type of certitude that will never restore to us the 'there is' of the world."⁵⁷

Moreover, it is precisely the thinking activity—the experiences of the thinking ego—that gives rise to doubt of the world's reality and of my own. Thinking can seize upon and get hold of everything real—event, object, its own thoughts; their realness is the only property that remains stubbornly beyond its reach. The *cogito ergo sum* is a fallacy not only in the sense that, as Nietzsche remarked, from the *cogito* only the existence of *cognitiones* could be inferred; the *cogito* is subject to the same doubt as the *sum*. The I-am is presupposed in the I-think; thought can seize on this presupposition but it can neither prove nor disprove it. (Kant's argument against Descartes was entirely right, too: The thought "*I am not . . . can-not exist; for if I am not, it follows that I cannot become aware that I am not.*"⁵⁸) Reality cannot be derived; thought or reflection can accept or reject it, and the Cartesian doubt, starting from the notion of a *Dieu trompeur*, is but a sophisticated and veiled form of rejection.⁵⁹ It remained for Wittgenstein, who had set out to investigate "how much truth there is in solipsism" and thus became its most relevant contemporary representative, to formulate the existential delusion underlying all its theories: "At death the world does not alter, but comes to an end." "Death is not an event in life; we do not live our death."⁶⁰ This is the basic premise of all solipsistic thinking.

Although everything that appears is perceived in the mode of it-seems-to-me, hence open to error and illusion, appearance as such carries with it a prior indication of *realness*. All sense experiences are normally accompanied by the additional, if usually mute, sensation of reality, and this despite the fact that none of our senses, taken in isolation, and no sense-object, taken out of context, can produce it. (Art therefore, which transforms sense-objects into thought-things, tears them first of all out of their context in order to de-realize and thus prepare them for their new and different function.)

The reality of what I perceive is guaranteed by its worldly context, which includes others who perceive as I do, on the one hand, and by the working together of my five senses on the other. What since Thomas Aquinas we call common sense, the *sensus communis*, is a kind of sixth sense needed to keep my five senses together and guarantee that it is the same object that I see, touch, taste, smell, and hear; it is the "one faculty [that] extends to all objects of the five senses."⁵¹ This same sense, a mysterious "sixth sense"⁵² because it cannot be localized as a bodily organ, fits the sensations of my strictly private five senses—so private that sensations in their mere sensational quality and intensity are incomunicable—into a common world shared by others. The subjectivity of the it-seems-to-me is remedied by the fact that the same object also appears to others though its mode of appearance may be different. (It is the inter-subjectivity of the world, rather than similarity of physical appearance, that convinces men that they belong to the same species. Though each single object appears in a different perspective to each individual, the context in which it appears is the same for the whole species. In this sense, every animal species lives in a world of its own, and the individual animal does not need to compare its own physical characteristics with those of its fellow-members in order to recognize them as such.) In a world of appearances, filled with error and semblance, reality is guaranteed by this three-fold commonness: the five senses, utterly different from each other, have the same object in common; members of the same species have the context in common that endows every single object with its particular meaning; and all other sense-endowed beings, though perceiving this object from utterly different perspectives, agree on its identity. Out of this threefold commonness arises the sensation of reality.

To each of our five senses corresponds a specific, sensorily perceptible property of the world. Our world is visible because we have vision, audible because we have hearing, touchable and full of odors and tastes because we have touch, smell, and taste. The sixth sense's corresponding worldly property is *realness*, and the difficulty with this property is that it cannot be perceived like other sensory properties. The sense of real-

ness is not a sensation strictly speaking; reality "is there even if we can never be certain that we know it" (Peirce),⁵³ for the "sensation" of reality, of sheer thereness, relates to the context in which single objects appear as well as to the context in which we ourselves as appearances exist among other appearing creatures. The context qua context never appears entirely; it is elusive, almost like Being, which qua Being never appears in a world filled with beings, with single entities. But Being, since Parmenides the highest concept of Western philosophy, is a thought-thing that we do not expect to be perceived by the senses or to cause a sensation, whereas realness is akin to sensation; a feeling of realness (or unreality) actually accompanies all the sensations of my senses, which without it would not make "sense." This is why Thomas Aquinas defined common sense, his "*sensus communis*," as an "inner sense"—*sensus interior*—that functioned as "the common root and principle of the exterior senses" ("*Sensus interior non dicitur communis . . . sicut genus; sed scut communis radix et principium exteriorum sensuum*").⁵⁴

To equate this "inner sense," which cannot be physically localized, with the faculty of thought is tempting indeed, because among the chief characteristics of thinking, occurring in a world of appearances and performed by an appearing being, is that it is itself invisible. From this property of invisibility, shared by common sense with the faculty of thought, Peirce concludes that "reality has a relationship to human thought," ignoring the fact that thinking is not only itself invisible but also deals with invisibles, with things not present to the senses though they may be, and mostly are, also sense-objects, remembered and collected in the storehouse of memory and thus prepared for later reflection. Thomas Landon Thorson elaborates Peirce's suggestion and comes to the conclusion that "reality bears a relationship to the thought process like the environment does to biological evolution."⁵⁵

These remarks and suggestions are based on the tacit assumption that thought processes are in no way different from common-sense reasoning; the result is the old Cartesian illusion in modern disguise. Whatever thinking can reach and whatever it may achieve, it is precisely reality as given to com-

mon sense, in its sheer thereness, that remains forever beyond its grasp, indissoluble into thought-trains—the stumbling block that alerts them and on which they founder in affirmation or negation. Thought processes, unlike common sense, can be physically located in the brain, but nevertheless transcend all biological data, be they functional or morphological in Portmann's sense. Common sense, on the contrary, and the feeling of realness belong to our biological apparatus, and common-sense reasoning (which the Oxford school of philosophy mistakes for thinking) could certainly bear the same relation to reality that biological evolution does to environment. With respect to common-sense reasoning, Thorson is right: "We may indeed be talking about more than an analogy; we may be describing two aspects of the same process."⁶⁸ And if language, in addition to its treasure of words for things given to the senses, did not offer us such thought-words, technically called "concepts," as justice, truth, courage, divinity, and so on, which are indispensable even in ordinary speech, we would certainly lack all tangible evidence for the thinking activity and hence might be justified in concluding with the early Wittgenstein: "Die Sprache ist ein Teil unseres Organismus" ("language is a part of our organism").⁶⁹

Thinking, however, which subjects everything it gets hold of to doubt, has no such natural, matter-of-fact relation to reality. It was thought—Descartes' reflection on the meaning of certain scientific discoveries—that destroyed his common-sense trust in reality, and his error was to hope he could overcome his doubt by insisting on withdrawing from the world altogether, eliminating every worldly reality from his thoughts and concentrating only on the thinking activity itself. (*Cogito cogitare, ergo sum*, is the correct form of the famous formula.) But thinking can neither prove nor destroy the *feeling* of realness arising out of the sixth sense, which the French, perhaps for this reason, also call *le bon sens*, the good sense; when thinking withdraws from the world of appearances, it withdraws from the sensorily given and hence also from the feeling of realness, given by common sense. Husserl claimed that the suspension [*epoché*] of this feeling was the methodological foundation of his phenomenological

science. For the thinking ego, this suspension is a matter of course and by no means a special method to be taught and learned; we know it as the quite ordinary phenomenon of absent-mindedness, to be observed in anyone who happens to be absorbed in no matter what sort of thought. In other words, the loss of common sense is neither the vice nor the virtue of Kant's "professional thinkers"; it happens to everybody who ever reflects on something; it only happens more often to professional thinkers. These we call philosophers, and their way of life will always be "the life of a stranger" (*bios xenikos*), as Aristotle called it in his *Politics*.⁷⁰ And the reason that strangeness and absent-mindedness are not more dangerous, that all "thinkers," professionals and laymen alike, survive so easily the loss of the feeling of realness, is just that the thinking ego asserts itself only temporarily: every thinker no matter how eminent remains "a man like you and me" (Plato), an appearance among appearances equipped with common sense and knowing enough common-sense reasoning to survive.

8 Science and common sense; Kant's distinction between intellect and reason, truth and meaning

Something very similar seems, at first glance, to be true of the modern scientist who constantly destroys authentic semblances without, however, destroying his own sensation of reality, telling him, as it tells us, that the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. It was thinking that enabled men to penetrate the appearances and unmask them as semblances, albeit authentic ones; common-sense reasoning would never have dared to upset so radically all the plausibilities of our sensory apparatus. The famous "quarrel between the ancients and the moderns" actually turns on the question of what the aim of knowledge is; is it "to save the phenomena," as the ancients believed, or to discover the hidden functional apparatus which makes them appear? Thought's doubt of the reliability of sense experience, its suspicion that things might

be quite different from the way they appear to human senses, was by no means uncommon in antiquity. Democritus' atoms were not only indivisible but invisible, moving in a void, infinite in number, and, through various configurations and combinations, producing impressions on our senses; Aristarchus in the third century B.C. first proposed the heliocentric hypothesis. It is interesting that the consequences of such daring were rather unpleasant: Democritus was suspected of being insane, and Aristarchus was threatened with an indictment for impiety. But the relevant point is of course that no attempt was made to prove these hypotheses and no science came out of it.

Thinking, no doubt, plays an enormous role in every scientific enterprise, but it is the role of a means to an end; the end is determined by a decision about what is worthwhile knowing, and this decision cannot be scientific. Moreover, the end is cognition or knowledge, which, having been obtained, clearly belongs to the world of appearances; once established as truth, it becomes part and parcel of the world. Cognition and the thirst for knowledge never leave the world of appearances altogether; if the scientists withdraw from it in order to "think," it is only in order to find better, more promising approaches, called methods, toward it. Science in this respect is but an enormously refined prolongation of common-sense reasoning in which sense illusions are constantly dissipated just as errors in science are corrected. The criterion in both cases is evidence, which as such is inherent in a world of appearances. And since it is in the very nature of appearances to reveal and to conceal, every correction and every dis-illusion "is the loss of one evidence only because it is the acquisition of another evidence," in the words of Merleau-Ponty.⁶⁸ Nothing, even in science's own understanding of the scientific enterprise, guarantees that the new evidence will prove to be more reliable than the discarded evidence.

The very concept of an *unlimited progress*, which accompanied the rise of modern science, and has remained its dominant inspiring principle, is the best documentation of the fact that all science still moves within the realm of common sense experience, subject to corrigible error and deception. When the experience of constant correction in scientific research is gen-

eralized, it leads into the curious "better and better," "truer and truer," that is, into the boudlessness of progress with its inherent admission that *the good and the true* are unattainable. If they were ever attained, the thirst for knowledge would be quenched and the search for cognition would come to an end. This, of course, is unlikely to happen, in view of the enormous amount of the unknown, but it is quite likely that particular sciences may reach definite limits of what is knowable to man. Yet the point is that the modern idea of progress implicitly denies such limitations. Unquestionably the notion of progress was born as the result of the tremendous advances of scientific knowledge, a veritable avalanche of discoveries, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and I think it quite possible that it was the relentlessness inherent in sheer thinking, whose need can never be assuaged, that, once it had invaded the sciences, drove the scientists to ever-new discoveries, each one giving rise to a new theory, so that those caught in the movement were subject to the illusion of a never-ending process—the process of progress. Here we should not forget that the later notion of an unending perfectibility of the human species, so prominent in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, was absent from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' rather pessimistic evaluation of human nature.

One consequence, however, of this development seems to me obvious and of considerable importance. The very notion of *truth*, which somehow had survived so many turning-points of our intellectual history, underwent a decisive change: it was transformed or, rather, broken down into a string of verities, each one in its time claiming general validity even though the very continuity of the research implied something merely provisional. This is a strange state of affairs. It may even suggest that if a given science accidentally reached its goal, this would by no means stop the workers in that field, who would be driven past their goal by the sheer momentum of the illusion of unlimited progress, a kind of semblance rising out of their activity.

The transformation of truth into mere verity results primarily from the fact that the scientist remains bound to the common sense by which we find our bearings in a world of

appearances. Thinking withdraws radically and for its own sake from this world and its evidential nature, whereas science profits from a possible withdrawal for the sake of specific results. In other words, it is common-sense reasoning ultimately that ventures out into the realm of sheer speculation in the theories of the scientists, and the chief weakness of common sense in this sphere has always been that it lacks the safeguards inherent in sheer thinking, namely, thinking's critical capacity, which, as we shall see, harbors within itself a highly self-destructive tendency. But to go back to the assumption of unlimited progress, the basic fallacy was early discovered. It is well known that not progress per se, but the notion of unlimitlessness would have made modern science unacceptable to the ancients. It is less well known that the Greeks had some reason for their "prejudice" against the infinite. (Plato discovered that everything permitting of a comparative is by nature unlimited, and limitlessness was to him as to all Greeks the cause of all evils.)⁷⁰ Hence, his great confidence in number and measurement: it sets limits on what of itself [pleasure, for instance] "does not and never will contain and derive from itself either beginning [*archē*] or middle or end [*telos*]."⁷¹)

That modern science, always hunting for manifestations of the invisible—atoms, molecules, particles, cells, genes—should have added to the world a spectacular, unprecedented quantity of new perceptible things is only seemingly paradoxical. In order to prove or disprove its hypotheses, its "paradigms" (Thomas Kuhn), and to discover what makes things work, it began to imitate the working processes of nature. For that purpose it produced the countless and enormously complex implements with which to force the non-appearing to appear (if only as an instrument-reading in the laboratory), as that was the sole means the scientist had to persuade himself of its reality. Modern technology was born in the laboratory, but this was not because scientists wanted to produce appliances or change the world. No matter how far their theories leave common-sense experience and common-sense reasoning behind, they must finally come back to some form of it or lose all sense of reality in the object of their investigation. And this return is possible only via the man-made, artificial world of the laboratory,

where that which does not appear of its own accord is forced to appear and to disclose itself. Technology, the "plumber's" work held in some contempt by the scientist, who sees practical applicability as a mere by-product of his own efforts, introduces scientific findings, made in "unparalleled insulation . . . from the demands of the laity and of everyday life,"⁷² into the everyday world of appearances and renders them accessible to common-sense experience; but this is possible only because the scientists themselves are ultimately dependent on that experience. Seen from the perspective of the "real" world, the laboratory is the anticipation of a changed environment; and the cognitive processes using the human abilities of thinking and fabricating as means to their end are indeed the most refined modes of common-sense reasoning. The activity of knowing is no less related to our sense of reality and no less a world-building activity than the building of houses.

The faculty of thinking, however, which Kant, as we have seen, called *Vernunft* (reason) to distinguish it from *Verstand* (intellect), the faculty of cognition, is of an altogether different nature. The distinction, on its most elementary level and in Kant's own words, lies in the fact that "concepts of reason serve us to conceive [*Begriffen*, comprehend], as concepts of the intellect serve us to apprehend perceptions" ("Vernunftbegriffe dienen zum Begreifen, wie Verstandesbegriffe zum Verstehen der Wahrnehmungen").⁷³ In other words, the intellect (*Verstand*) desires to grasp what is given to the senses, but reason (*Vernunft*) wishes to understand its meaning. Cognition, whose highest criterion is truth, derives that criterion from the world of appearances in which we take our bearings through sense perceptions, whose testimony is self-evident, that is, unshakeable by argument and irreplaceable only by other evidence. As the German translation of the Latin *perceptionis*, the word *Wahrnehmung* used by Kant (what is given me in perceptions and ought to be true [*Wahr*]) clearly indicates, truth is located in the evidence of the senses. But that is by no means the case with meaning and with the faculty of thought, which searches for it; the latter does not ask what something is or whether it exists at all—it's existence is always taken for granted—but what it means for it to be. This dis-

tinction between truth and meaning seems to me to be not only decisive for any inquiry into the nature of human thinking but also to be the necessary consequence of Kant's crucial distinction between reason and intellect. Admittedly, Kant himself never pursued that particular implication of his own thought; in fact, a clear-cut line of demarcation between these two altogether different modes cannot be found in the history of philosophy. The exceptions—occasional remarks by Aristotle in *On Interpretation*—remained without significance for Aristotle's later philosophy. In that early treatise on language he writes: Every "logos [sentence, in the context] is a significant sound (*phōnē sēmantikē*)"; it gives a sign, points out something. But "not every *logos* is revealing (*apophantikos*), only those in which true speech or false speech (*diētheuein* or *paeudesthui*) holds sway. This is not always the case; for example, a prayer is a *logos* [it is significant] but neither true nor false."⁷⁴

The questions raised by our thirst for knowledge arise from our curiosity about the world, our desire to investigate whatever is given to our sensory apparatus. The famous first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, "*Pantes anthrōpoi tou eidēnai oregontai physē*"—“All men by nature desire to know”—literally translated reads: “All men desire to see and to have seen [that is, to know],” and Aristotle immediately adds: “An indication of this is our love of the senses; for they are loved for their own sake, quite apart from their use.” The questions raised by the desire to know are in principle all answerable by common-sense experience and common-sense reasoning; they are exposed to corrigible error and illusion in the same way as sense perceptions and experiences. Even the relentlessness of modern science's Progress, which constantly corrects itself by discarding the answers and reformulating the questions, does not contradict science's basic goal—to see and to know the world as it is given to the senses—and its concept of truth is derived from the common-sense experience of irrefutable evidence, which dispels error and illusion. But the questions raised by thinking and which it is in reason's very nature to raise—questions of meaning—are all unanswerable by common sense and the refinement of it

we call science. The quest for meaning is “meaningless” to common sense and common-sense reasoning because it is the sixth sense's function to fit us into the world of appearances and make us at home in the world given by our five senses; there we are and no questions asked.

What science and the quest for knowledge are after is *irrefutable truth*, that is, propositions human beings are not free to reject—they are compelling. They are of two kinds, as we have known since Leibniz: truths of reasoning and truths of fact. The main distinction between them lies in the degree of their force of compulsion: the truths of “Reasoning are necessary and their opposite is impossible” while “those of Fact are contingent and their opposite is possible.”⁷⁵ The distinction is very important although perhaps not in the sense Leibniz himself meant. Truths of fact, their contingency notwithstanding, are as compelling for anybody witnessing them with his own eyes as the proposition that two and two make four is for anybody in his right mind. The point is only that a fact, an event, can never be witnessed by everyone who may want to know about it, whereas rational or mathematical truth presents itself as self-evident to everyone endowed with the same brain power; its compelling nature is universal, while the compelling force of factual truth is limited; it does not reach those who, not having been witnesses, have to rely on the testimony of others, whom one may or may not believe. The true opposite of factual, as distinguished from rational, truth is not error or illusion but the deliberate lie.

Leibniz' distinction between the truths of fact and the truths of reasoning, whose highest form is mathematical reasoning—which deals only with thought-things and needs neither witnesses nor the sensorily given—is based on the age-old distinction between necessity and contingency, according to which all that is necessary, and whose opposite is impossible, possesses a higher ontological dignity than whatever is but could also not be. This conviction that mathematical reasoning should serve as a paradigm for all thought is probably as old as Pythagoras; at any rate we find it in Plato's refusal to admit anyone to philosophy who has not been trained in mathematics. It is still at the root of the medieval *dictamen rationis*, the

d dictate of reason. That truth compels with the force of necessity (*anagkē*), which is far stronger than the force of violence (*bία*), is an old *topos* in Greek philosophy, and it is always meant as a compliment to truth that it can compel men with the irresistible force of Necessity (*hyp' autēs alithetis anagkas-thentes*, in the words of Aristotle⁷⁷). "Euclide," as Mercier de la Rivière once noted, "est un véritable despote; et les vérités qu'il nous a transmises, sont des lois véritablement despotes."⁷⁸ The same notion led Grotius to the conviction that "even God cannot cause two times two not to make four"—a very questionable proposition not only because it would put God under the dictate of necessity but because, if true, it would be equally valid for the evidence of sense perception, and it was on these grounds that Duns Scotus had questioned it.

The source of mathematical truth is the human brain, and brain power is no less natural, no less equipped to guide us through an appearing world, than our senses plus common sense and the extension of it that Kant called intellect. The best proof of this may lie in the otherwise quite mysterious fact that mathematical reasoning, the purest activity of our brain, and at first glance, because of its abstraction from all qualities given to our senses, the farthest removed from sheer common-sense reasoning, could play such an enormously liberating role in science's exploration of the universe. The intellect, the organ of knowledge and cognition, is still of this world; in the words of Duns Scotus, it falls under the sway of nature, *cadit sub natura*, and carries with it all the necessities to which a living being, endowed with sense organs and brain power, is subject. The opposite of necessity is not contingency or accident but freedom. Everything that appears to human eyes, everything that occurs to the human mind, everything that happens to mortals for better or worse is "contingent," including their own existence. We all know:

Unpredictably, decades ago, You arrived
among that unending cascade of creatures spewed
from Nature's maw. A random event, says Science,
I-am.

But that does not prevent us from answering with the poet:

Random my bottom! A true miracle, say I,
for who is not certain that he was meant to be?⁷⁹

But this being "meant to be" is not a truth; it is a highly meaningful proposition.

In other words, there are no truths beyond and above factual truths: all scientific truths are factual truths, those engendered by sheer brain power and expressed in a specially designed sign language not excluded, and only factual statements are scientifically verifiable. Thus the statement "A triangle laughs" is not untrue but meaningless, whereas the old ontological demonstration of the existence of God, as we find it in Anselm of Canterbury, is not valid and in this sense not true, but it is full of meaning. Knowing certainly aims at truth, even if this truth, as in the sciences, is never an abiding truth but a provisional verity that we expect to exchange against other, more accurate verities as knowledge progresses.

To expect truth to come from thinking signifies that we mistake the need to think with the urge to know. Thinking can and must be employed in the attempt to know, but in the exercise of this function it is never itself; it is but the handmaiden of an altogether different enterprise. (Hegel seems to have been the first to protest against the modern development that tends to put philosophy in a position similar to the one it had in the Middle Ages. "Then, philosophy was supposed to be the handmaiden of theology, humbly accepting its achievements, and asked to bring them into a clean logical order and present them in a plausible, conceptually demonstrable context. Now, philosophy is supposed to be the handmaiden of the other sciences. . . . Its task is to demonstrate the methods of the sciences"—something Hegel denounces as "catching the shadow of shadows."⁸⁰)

Truth is what we are compelled to admit by the nature either of our senses or of our brain. The proposition that everybody who is "was meant to be" can easily be refuted; but the certainty of the I "was meant to be" will survive refutation intact because it is inherent in every thinking reflection on the I-am.

By drawing a distinguishing line between truth and mean-

ing, between knowing and thinking, and by insisting on its importance, I do not wish to deny that thinking's quest for meaning and knowledge's quest for truth are connected. By posing the unanswerable questions of meaning, men establish themselves as question-asking beings. Behind all the cognitive questions for which men find answers, there lurk the unanswerable ones that seem entirely idle and have always been denounced as such. It is more than likely that men, if they were ever to lose the appetite for meaning we call thinking and cease to ask unanswerable questions, would lose not only the ability to produce those thought-things that we call works of art but also the capacity to ask all the answerable questions upon which every civilization is founded. In this sense, reason is the a priori condition of the intellect and of cognition; it is because reason and intellect are so connected, despite utter difference in mood and purpose, that the philosophers have always been tempted to accept the criterion of truth—so valid for science and everyday life—as applicable to their own rather extraordinary business as well. For our desire to know, whether arising out of practical or purely theoretical perplexities, can be fulfilled when it reaches its prescribed goal, and while our thirst for knowledge may be unquenchable because of the immensity of the unknown, the activity itself leaves behind a growing treasure of knowledge that is retained and kept in store by every civilization as part and parcel of its world. The loss of this accumulation and of the technical expertise required to conserve and increase it inevitably spells the end of this particular world. The thinking activity on the contrary leaves nothing so tangible behind, and the need to think can therefore never be stilled by the insights of "wise men." As far as positive results are concerned, the most we can expect from it is what Kant finally achieved in carrying out his purpose "to extend, albeit only negatively, our use of reason beyond the limitations of the sensorily given world, that is, to eliminate the obstacles by which reason hinders itself."⁵¹ Kant's famous distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand*, between a faculty of speculative thought and the ability to

know arising out of sense experience—where "all thought is but a means to reach intuition" ("In whatever manner and by whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, intuition is that through which it is in immediate relation to them, and to which all thought is directed as a means")⁵²—has consequences more far-reaching, and even perhaps quite other, than those he himself recognized.⁵³ (While discussing Plato, he once remarked "that it is by no means unusual, upon comparing the thoughts which an author has expressed in regard to his subject . . . to find that we understand him better than he has understood himself. As he has not sufficiently determined his concept, he has sometimes spoken, or even thought, in opposition to his own intention."⁵⁴ And this is of course applicable to his own work.) Although he insisted on the inability of reason to arrive at knowledge, especially with respect to God, Freedom, and Immortality—to him the highest objects of thought—he could not part altogether with the conviction that the final aim of thinking, as of knowledge, is truth and cognition; he thus uses, throughout the Critiques, the term *Vernunfterkennnis*, "knowledge arising out of pure reason,"⁵⁵ a notion that ought to have been a contradiction in terms for him. He never became fully aware of having liberated reason and thinking, of having justified this faculty and its activity even though they could not boast of any "positive" results. As we have seen, he stated that he had "found it necessary to deny knowledge . . . to make room for *faith*,"⁵⁶ but all he had "denied" was knowledge of things that are unknowable, and he had not made room for faith but for thought. He believed that he had built the foundations of a future "systematic metaphysic" as "a bequest to posterity,"⁵⁷ and it is true that without Kant's unshackling of speculative thought the rise of German idealism and its metaphysical systems would hardly have been possible. But the new brand of philosophers—Fichte, Schelling, Hegel—would scarcely have pleased Kant. Liberated by Kant from the old school dogmatism and its sterile exercises, encouraged by him to indulge in speculative thinking, they actually took their cue from Descartes, went hunting for certainty, blurred once again the distinguishing

line between thought and knowledge, and believed in all earnest that the results of their speculations possessed the same kind of validity as the results of cognitive processes. What undermined Kant's greatest discovery, the distinction between knowledge, which uses thinking as a means to an end, and thinking itself as it arises out of "the very nature of our reason" and is done for its own sake, was that he constantly compared the two with each other. Only if truth (in Kant, intuition), and not meaning, is the ultimate criterion of man's mental activities does it make sense in this context to speak of deception and illusion at all. "It is impossible," he says, that reason, "this highest tribunal of all the rights and claims of speculation should itself be the source of deceptions and illusions."³⁸ He is right, but only because reason as the faculty of speculative thought does not move in the world of appearances and hence can produce non-sense and meaninglessness but neither illusion nor deception, which properly belong to the realm of sense perception and common-sense reasoning. He recognizes this himself when he calls the ideas of pure reason only "heuristic," not "ostensive" concepts;³⁹ they are tentative—they do not demonstrate or show anything. "They ought not to be assumed as existing in themselves, but only as having the reality of a schema . . . [and] should be regarded only as analogs of real things, not as in themselves real things."⁴⁰ In other words, they neither reach nor are able to present and represent reality. It is not merely the other-worldly transcendent things that they can never reach; the realness given by the senses playing together, kept in tune by common sense, and that is guaranteed by the fact of plurality—is beyond their grasp. But Kant does not insist on this side of the matter, because he is afraid that his ideas might then turn out to be "empty thought-things" (*leere Gedanken*)⁴¹—as indeed they invariably do when they dare to show themselves nakedly, that is, untransformed and in a way unfalsified by language, in our everyday world and in every-day communication.

It is perhaps for the same reason that he equates what we have here called meaning with Purpose and even Intention (*Zweck* and *Absicht*): The "highest formal unity, which rests

solely on concepts of reason, is the *purposive unity* of things. The *speculative* interest of reason makes it necessary to regard all order in the world as if it had originated in the [intention] of a supreme reason."⁴² Now, it turns out, reason pursues specific purposes, has specific intentions in resorting to its ideas; it is the need of human reason and its interest in God, Freedom, and Immortality that make men think, even though only a few pages later he will admit that "the mere speculative interest of reason" with respect to the three main objects of thought—"the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God"—"is very small; and for its sake alone we should hardly have undertaken the labor of transcendental investigations . . . since whatever discoveries might be made in regard to these matters, we should not be able to make use of them in any helpful manner *in concreto*."⁴³

But we do not have to go hunting for small contradictions in the work of this very great thinker. Right in the midst of the passages quoted above occurs the sentence that stands in the greatest possible contrast to his own equation of reason with Purpose: "Pure reason is in fact occupied with nothing but itself. It can have no other vocation."⁴⁴