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Andrea Poma

Cadenzas

Philosophical Notes for Postmodernism

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To Ilaria
With her,
in the cadenza of Montparnasse,
we have lived and still live
according to this book

Preface

The designations given by contemporaries or by posterity to (respectively) present or previous cultural epochs are usually inadequate or not fully satisfactory; this is due to the inevitable bias of both the former and the latter. Sometimes posterity, looking back to past cultures, does so with a sense of superiority, defining them with disregard (e.g. The Middle Ages); sometimes, instead, due a sense of inferiority, it idealises them (e.g. classical Greek or Roman times). As for the contemporaries, they feel like they belong to a new culture, and often understandably transpose in the chosen name this sense of novelty, along with their hope and future projects (e.g. Modernity, the Enlightenment).

Among all designations, the one that has been and is still used to indicate contemporary culture – postmodernity or postmodernism – surely seems to be the least significant and the most unfortunate. Indeed, it does not come across as a real name endowed with specific meaning, but rather as something standing for a name, a provisional indication while waiting for an adequate one: postmodernity merely signifies the fact that it comes "after" modernity, with no hint whatsoever at the novelty of this culture.

And yet, this is only seemingly so. In my opinion, the sole and only indication of posterity is in itself full of meaning and conveniently expresses the radical novelty of the contemporary culture. No other culture has ever defined itself in terms of its own posterity compared to something else. In fact, it is even hard to imagine how a culture could think itself with no reference to a future, a project, a program – with no end and no horizon to look at. But this is *precisely* the absolute novelty, at least at a first glance, of the contemporary culture. Also, in this denomination, the reference to the past is both weak and strong. It is weak because it is a generic indication of posterity, with no further determinations of its relationship with the past. It is strong because this very generic indeterminacy expresses an intentional understatement of the relationship with modernity: undervaluing something or someone can be (and in this case is) the most radical way to mark one's detachment from, and extraneity to, it.

There are many ways to relate to what came before, or in any case to what is different. Some ways underline continuity, descent, legacy, communication; others

accentuate diversity, difference or even opposition. In all these cases, in both the positive and the critical forms, what is being expressed is a strong relationship with the other. On the contrary, foreignness, otherness, and oblivion express the weakening of the relationship with the other, up to its complete absence. Of course, before the greatness, the breadth, the depth of meaning of modernity, it would be unthinkable that a cultural change could have happened, simply and briefly, by oblivion. In fact it is not so: postmodernism is not the culture that has supplanted modernism; it rather settled into the gap created by a long, complex and radical process of destruction of modernism, internally operated by modernity against itself. Postmodernism would certainly not have arisen if it did not follow the complex and radical critique of modernity that characterised European culture from the end of the ninteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. Many philosophers, starting from different presuppositions and in different ways, have taken part in the same radical criticism of an abstract, totalitarian and instrumental reason in the name of a "new way of thinking," closer to real life or itself an expression of concrete life (understood in several different ways: existential, biological, psychological, historical, political, etc.). At the same time, people sought a thought that, freed from bad rationality, could come to think the unthought-of, or even the unthinkable. This radical philosophical criticism was part of a broader cultural movement, which also included the deconstruction and the dissolution of form in the arts, the discussion and the weakening of the foundations in science, the criticism and destruction of the bourgeois models in morality, politics, economy, and religion. This cultural movement, so broad and complex as to constitute a common atmosphere for very different theories, is what I would call "antimodernism" because even in its critical nature and in its deconstruction of the structures of "modernity" – or rather, because of this critical and in some cases dialectic character – it was still a phase of modernity itself. If we wish to consider postmodernism as an heir of antimodernism, it cannot be understood in the light of continuity: in fact, postmodernism is actually another thing, especially because it explicitly rejects the critical nature of antimodernism, indeed considering the latter a phase of modernity. Postmodernism can be considered a heir of antimodernism only as it was born out of the cultural space left empty by the latter's destruction (which, besides, was significant, necessary and inevitable): the peculiar character of postmodernism is the enthusiastic and Dionysian conviction that it can occupy the emptiness left by the end of modernity, giving rise to a new culture that, perhaps for the first time in history, does not rest on new forms, new foundations and new models, but rather emancipates itself from every form and every foundation.

As you can see, the "post-" that determines the new culture, despite its indeterminacy and genericness (or rather, precisely because of them) expresses a strong break with modernity – the strongest break possible. It is the rejection of any consideration or comparison: it is disinterest and radical oblivion.[1] Thus the new culture also expresses a clear determination of its novelty: it is a literally ab-solute novelty,

[1] Cf. J.-F. LYOTARD, *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants. Correspondance 1982-1985*, Éditions Galilée, Paris 1986, p. 126.

with no relation or bond to anything else. This seems, and actually is, an aporia: one of the many aporias on which postmodernism rests. In fact, postmodernism coherently (forgive the irony) takes aporia as one of its main structures.

It is clear that an absolute "novum," with no relation to the past, also denies any relation to the future, any teleological meaning, any programmatic horizon. Furthermore, not locating itself between a past and a future, it doesn't even properly have a present (at least in the modern sense of the word). This is something to address in greater depth.

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Perhaps now I should take a step back, because in order to start *in medias res* I let postmodernism come on stage under the unquestioned title of "new culture." This attribution, however, is far from universally accepted. My argumentation in favour of this thesis will unfold throughout the whole book, but this preliminary assumption should at least be immediately explained from my subjective viewpoint. As happened to many others, I came across postmodernism as a philosophical theme. There were quite a few books about it, mainly published between the 1960s and the 1990s. Of course, some were better than others, and some were more solid than others, but they generally appeared rather abstruse compared to usual philosophical argumentation. My first reaction – and I'm sure happened to many – was one of condescendence and indifference: the whole thing seemed nothing but a new fashion destined to surprise the reader rather than to convince her through demonstration. My perspective changed when I started to associate the consideration of those theories with the acknowledgment of deep changes in the general mind-set, in social organisation, in individual and collective behaviours. It was increasingly obviously and incontestable that radical cultural changes were taking place investing not only the separate, intellectual world of theories, but also the whole of society. In short, we were witnessing a comprehensive cultural change that demanded to be perceived, understood and interpreted. Some of those books, of high philosophical quality, proved able to interpret this new culture, formulating its analysis and theory and proposing it in a programmatic way. It is evident that from this new perspective – taking these works not as sophisticated gratuitous intellectual constructions but as theories of a new cultural reality, much broader than their borders, involving the whole individual and social reality – those books took on much greater importance and relevance: they deserved to be read and pondered, in continuous exchange with the observation and experience of the new cultural phenomena widespread in common behaviour and mentality.

As I mentioned, philosophical literature on postmodernism had a rather short life: the most significant production took place between the 1960s and 1990s. This seems to suggest that, despite all I've said above, it was indeed a fleeting and ephemeral fashion. But this was not the case. What I think, which grounds the reflections to follow, is that postmodernism does represent a new culture: a real, radical and epochal cultural change whose breadth (now and probably for a while) we fail to comprehend. If the philosophical literature on postmodernism has had such a short

life, it is because of precise and specific reasons. Of course, this phenomenon cannot only be explained with the death of (most of) the great authors who produced it: this would beg the question why there haven't been others to carry on their legacy. Rather, for me, the main reason is the intimate (necessary and inevitable) contradictoriness of that literature and therefore its destiny of self-negation – a destiny it knowingly accepted.

There are different genres within the literature on postmodernism. Some essays have tried to describe, analyse and comprehend the new cultural situation; other have proposed programs for this new culture; finally, some have tried to express it, presenting themselves as postmodern texts. On the other hand, there have also been polemical and critical essays against postmodernism. They are sometimes very interesting, and surely deserve to be taken into account in a comprehensive reconstruction of postmodernism, but precisely because of their polemical approach they cannot be deemed an expression of postmodernism themselves. Of course this distinction was not really so sharp and schematic, and most texts belong to most or many of those perspectives, but it is safe to say that every text has a stronger inclination towards one direction or the other as for its general intentions. Now, the books that, in the abovementioned period, presented postmodern culture were usually expositive, analytical or programmatic and therefore, by necessity, *they were not postmodern texts*. They rather took on the important task to describe the new culture, also in relation to what came before, explaining its novelty also in terms of difference compared to the previous climate. The "post" they indicated, in short, could not prescind from a recapitulation of the "ante" that had made the "post" possible: for their very status of books and for their task, those texts still fell into modernity, to which they were trying to explain postmodernity, in which they themselves urged to transfix whilst denying themselves. Once this function of "postmodernism for dummies" textbooks was exhausted, this literature ran out, leaving the stage to postmodern texts proper. It is not clear whether such texts still belonged to philosophy in the traditional sense of the term or if they were new also in this sense. After all, in art the traditional distinctions of genre (painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, novel, theatre, music etc.) had long lost their boundaries. Perhaps sciences, too, are destined to develop far away from traditional classifications. So why should philosophy stay untouched by the general change? This is one of the many aspects of the new culture that have not been clarified yet and on which it is pointless to make previsions: culture itself will provide its modes of expression, little by little, and once they are accomplished they'll be recognised as the most adequate and obvious ones.

The approach I seek to adopt here is different. Having been trained in modernity – which gave me contents and methods of great meaning to which I'm still very close by training and conviction – my approach to postmodernism is not one of enthusiasm for the full emancipation from form and rationality. On the contrary, I look at postmodernism as a modernist that doesn't deny his culture, but – precisely because of the critical attitude such a culture has taught him – rather notes that all must be re-discussed in this new cultural climate for philosophical reflection to be able to speak *in* contemporaneity *about* contemporaneity. It is not at all necessary to

deny modernity to notice that, whether we like it or not, we are all part of the new postmodern culture, which not only surrounds us but is actually a part of us. Cato's rejection of the new in the name of the good ancient times, the angry polemic against the inconsistency of the new culture – measured with the same units as the old one through an intentional fallacy –, the stubborn wish to follow the old path while being candidly indifferent to the new condition: all those are a-critical attitudes, vapid, illusory and not at all modernist. They are a-critical because the way to defend the value of every culture and the modern one in particular (as, more than any other, it took a critical attitude as the path to truth or at least as the way to search of it) is not to forget the past forms of its elaboration and development, but rather to open them up to the possibility of going beyond themselves, in a vital exchange with the living developments of history and culture. In other words, the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, took place only once, in the seventeenth century, and the latter won. It would be absurd now to re-propose it as the quarrel between the moderns and the postmoderns, with the former playing the role of "*anciens*," whom they defeated to begin with. They are vapid because those who condemn, underestimate or remove the contemporary world, time and culture – today as always – are actually condemning themselves to the impossibility to understand, to dialogue and to act: it means carrying on playing a meaningless game. They are illusory because even those who do not accept the new culture are still inevitably a part of it, and their being unaware of this does not prevent the radical change of meaning of their very position. It is all too easy to acknowledge that fundamentalists, reactionaries, and impassible academics today inadvertently play a very different role from what they intend to play. To make just one example, take the strenuous fundamentalist defence of an ideology: in the radical and conflicting dialectic of ideologies of the modern age, it was a means of cultural, political or religious affirmation, up to the effective power of dogmatism. In today's climate of indifference and ideological scepticism, though, it can easily take place in a talk show or an artistic contamination, or exhibited as a media performance, contributing – sometimes against the very intentions of those who support it in a too short-sighted manner – to the relativistic (and therefore radically anti-ideological) flavour of the whole thing.

In short, and somewhat simplifying, my approach could be summed up in the following question: *what can a modernist say in postmodern culture?* I am not just aiming for a hasty and superficial exterior revision or a cosmetic update to make old contents and methods fashionable, without really changing anything. This happens rather often in life and even in philosophy books, but it only produces an even more clichéd rhetoric than the fundamentalist one. I do not want to abandon the sinking ship – so to speak – and try to hide on the new ship, imitating the gestures and culture of the new crew. This also happens quite frequently and is rather squalid: those who are unable to treasure the things they have been carrying on the ship on which they have travelled most of their lives have no difficulty in leaving the old deck for on the new one. But how can they really be trusted to actually fit in and collaborate with the new crew for a new navigation? We are talking about a different language, different concepts, different categories: a substantial, radical and unconditioned change in the faith that authentic contents and solid methods – or at least their deep

meaning – are permanently valid, and that their truth can be relied on if only one interprets and expressed it rightly in every age. Pier Paolo Pasolini clearly summed up this serious attitude in the apologue of *The Haws and the Sparrows* (*Uccellacci e uccellini*, 1966).

What I am saying is likely to be unacceptable for most theoreticians of postmodernism, as it comes across as the attempt to describe some continuity – at least at the personal level – between modernism and a culture that, as we have seen, describes itself by its very discontinuity with it. This potential rejection of my approach might surely be food for thought and debate, but does not make my attempt inconsistent as such. First of all, the theoreticians of postmodernism might have exaggerated its discontinuity to highlight its novelty (as has always happened in the past), so that highlighting some degree of continuity would mean to balance things out. Also, while relying on the analysis of the existing literature on postmodernism, my approach probably leads to elaborating programs for the new culture that are very different from those already formulated by others. Despite being a fundamental point of reference and a helpful tool for anyone who wants to address the issue, the validity and accuracy of the analyses of a cultural situation – such as those formulated by the most important writers who dealt with postmodernism – does not imply accepting the interpretative and programmatic proposals made by the authors of such analyses. Postmodernism is a culture, not an ideology: the ideology of postmodernism that some authors have legitimately constructed based on those analyses is not the only viable way, nor the only legitimate one. Both in modern and in postmodern culture there is space for different programs, their interaction and their confrontation. The approach I propose here probably risks being vague, imprecise and even mistaken – more so than others – in navigating these new seas stretching out through space and time. These weaknesses must be accepted as inevitable but useful, I think, especially by those who expose themselves on this path. I cannot help recalling the numerous and obscure intellectuals who, in previous analogous situations of transit to a wholly new culture, condemned themselves to working, passing on, reflecting and reinterpreting, without ever really understanding what was going on. Thus they spent their days working in their inner darkness, never seeing the light, not even at the end of their hard work; and yet their work was important to the new culture. Once reached land, the people living on it realised that it was thanks to them, to those who travelled without ever reaching it, that their settlement was possible. Most of all, they realised that that travelling without reaching the destination taught them a new way to settle down and inhabit land, and a new meaning of cultivating it.

*****

With regards to these last considerations, I would like to say a few words about this book and the discourse it articulates.

I believe it is completely inappropriate and devoid of rational justification to consider the present time and culture as an age of decadence on which to express the most trivially self-gratifying derogatory remarks, but also the most unreasonable

and unfounded ones. It is rather, as I said above, a time of passage, a time "between two worlds:" that is, between a bygone culture, the modern one, and one that has not yet taken shape, the postmodern one. As I have tried to show, those who try to think about this time, or to reflect and write on it – like all those who try to operate in every aspect of culture – must accept to do so in a state of suspension of models that will probably last longer than their very work, so that they shall not see the end of it. I think that this thinking and writing in suspended time and form could find an adequate representation in the musical figure of the "cadenza." As is known, a musical cadenza is the final succession of notes or chords of a musical, vocal or instrumental composition, or a section or phrase of it. By extension, though, this term also indicates the modulation on the penultimate note, which can be minimal (such as a single modulation or a trill), but also quite extended, up to giving rise to a large and complicated musical phrase. Until the late eighteenth century, the cadenza was not written by the author, but was left to the fantasy and improvisation of the performer; thereafter the cadenzas were instead usually written by the author himself. Of course, because of their relation to the performer's improvisation, cadenzas were often the occasion of display of virtuosism, but by no means can they be reduced to mere frills. In fact, lingering on the penultimate note delaying the final one – a custom that goes back to the beginning of Western music: Gregorian chants – meets a serious and profound need of the human spirit. In music, as in all aspects of life, we are inclined to delay the conclusion of a significant event, so as to stay in it as much as we can, before experiencing its end. We attempt to postpone the fatal task of the angel of death with questions, riddles, puzzles, challenges – in short, by every means at our disposal – and in doing so we produce more meaningful events and beautiful stories. This is the theme of many fairy tales. Indeed, it is perhaps one of the very meanings of fairy tales, as the *Arabian Nights* teach us.

However, the meaning of the musical cadenza to which I refer in the title of this volume is not the one just mentioned of procrastinating the end, but rather the meaning inherent in the fact that the musical cadenza, for the characteristics described above, is expressed as a musical modulation *out of time*. It no longer participates in the phrase, which is now being completed, nor does it participate in this completion. It is music out of time, "in between" times – which is evident in cadenzas of pieces written in mensural writing, which are indicated by notes in a smaller character, as they cannot be contained in the quantitative value of the measurement. There are many examples of this: think, for instance, of some cadenzas in Chopin's work.

Therefore, a cadenza is music out of time, which nevertheless sings and sounds, bearing rich and substantial meaning. As I mentioned above, this seems to me the condition of philosophical thought today, caught in between a bygone modernity and a postmodernity that is still taking shape. That's why I thought it was opportune and adequate to use this musical metaphor to indicate the character of the notes and reflections in this book, outlining a possible philosophical project for postmodernity.

The text is organized into three parts, corresponding to three important issues for the post-modern thought. Each of these issues is introduced with a formulation taken from the great literary texts of the tradition, followed by some "cadenzas"

unfolding its meaning and implications. The first issue concerns the fundamental conditions of a post-modern thought and develops the concept of "*Sehnsucht*"[2] as a central inspiration of the project proposed here. The second issue is the condition of the broken subject and its implications. The third theme, finally, is the question of history and teleology, and proposes the concept of "humour" as its main inspiration. The "cadenza instead of a conclusion" is an attempt to propose a humanistic perspective in postmodernism, collecting in it all the elements previously developed.

With this book I wish to make a contribution, however small, to the work suspended in between times that we are destined to today. I hope that at least parts or bits of it might avail the search of the new form.

*****

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Turin, Italy Andrea Poma
15 September 2013

[2] I chose, here and throughout the text – albeit with a few exceptions – not to translate the German word "*Sehnsucht*," because it seems that the particular significance of meanings that it entails cannot find an adequate translation into English. The term "nostalgia" has a meaning related to the past, which is foreign to the word "*Sehnsucht*;" the term "yearning" does not underline enough the pathic character of the German word. To somehow suggest at least partially to the reader the aura of meaning of the word, I quote here a passage from Ladislao Mittner. However, it should be noted that he places the word "*Sehnsucht*" in the romantic context while I, following Cohen, radically take it away from it: "it is the 'disease' (Sucht) of 'desire' (Sehnen). But 'Sehnen' itself very often means a desire that is unattainable because it is indefinable, a wish for everything and nothing at once; it is no coincidence that 'Sucht' was reinterpreted, with one of those 'false etymologies' which are creations of new psychological and artistic realities, as a 'Suchen,' a search; and 'Sehnsucht' is really a search of desire, a desire to desire, a desire that is felt as unquenchable:" L. MITTNER, *Storia della letteratura tedesca*, vol. II: *Dal pietismo al romanticismo (1700-1820)*, Einaudi, Turin 2002, Vol. III, p. 700. In the course of the text, my understanding of the word – quite different from the romantic one – will emerge as the feeling of the presence of an absence.

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Theme I

I was sleeping, but my heart kept vigil;
I heard my lover knocking:
“Open to me, my sister, my beloved,
my dove, my perfect one!
For my head is wet with dew,
my locks with the moisture of the night.”

I have taken off my robe,
am I then to put it on?
I have bathed my feet,
am I then to soil them?

My lover put his hand through the opening;
my heart trembled within me,
and I grew faint when he spoke.

I rose to open to my lover,
with my hands dripping myrrh:
With my fingers dripping choice myrrh
upon the fittings of the lock.

I opened to my lover –
but my lover had departed, gone.
I sought him but I did not find him;
I called to him but he did not answer me.

The watchmen came upon me
as they made their rounds of the city;
They struck me, and wounded me,
and took my mantle from me,
the guardians of the walls.

I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my lover –
What shall you tell him? –
that I am faint with love.

How does your lover differ from any other,
most beautiful among women?
How does your lover differ from any other,
that you adjure us so?

(*The Song of Songs* 5, 2–9, The New American Bible 2002)

Cadenza 1
Yearning for Form
Hermann Cohen in Postmodernism

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, – ach der mich liebt und kennt

(J.W. Goethe – H. Cohen)

The question I intend to face here is, I believe, a simple and relevant one: if and how Hermann Cohen's thought can be an important point of reference in present day postmodern culture. The implicit assumption is that nowadays we live and think in a completely new cultural context, which is radically different from modernism and aware of this difference. Postmodernism is not only a current of thought, which reached its climax in certain philosophical theorisations and artistic expressions between the 1960s and 1990s, doomed to oblivion, like all fashions, but a profound turning point, involving all aspects of contemporary society and culture, with which philosophy must also come to terms on a stable basis. This is the assumption, and the consequence is clear: either Hermann Cohen's thought has perspectives and themes that are relevant for the development of philosophical thought and culture in general in the postmodern period, or it will be relegated to archaeology and the museum, which, at most, would justify going on with historical and philological research into it, but not theoretical development starting out from it.

The question in the form of "if and how" as I posed it at the beginning, could appear pleonastic, since, it would seem, there is no other way to demonstrate the present relevance of a philosophy than that of exhibiting those of its aspects and themes which are still valid and significant. Nevertheless, with the first question, I intend to face an absolutely preliminary, radical problem: whether, that is, the very consideration of content and method of Cohen's philosophy is still justified or not. Only an affirmative answer to this question will lead to the problem of "how," i.e. identification of possible reasons for present day interest in this philosophy. Postmodern culture, like all culture, is certainly not unitary, even less uniform: there is room in it for many different perspectives, divergences, disputes and even conflicts of ideas. Besides, when looking beneath appearances, postmodern problems are not all that different from those of modern culture and previous cultures. Fundamental problems have always continued and will perhaps always continue to be present and posed anew as cultures develop. Nevertheless, like every culture, postmodernism also radically rejects certain past thought modalities, perspectives

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and even categories. They are not considered in debate nor is any right of citizenship allowed them. They are simply ignored, precisely because the entire culture is built up despite them; it actually develops *on the basis* of this rejection. Now, if we were to accept that Cohen's philosophy is part of these denied, rejected, obsolete thoughts, there would be no point in further considering his contemporary relevance. But if, on the contrary, we were able to demonstrate that it does not fall under this cultural ostracism, then it would have every right of entry into the *agorà* of philosophical debate and present its arguments there. Then there would be good reason for going on to the question of "how."

When posing the question of the contemporary relevance of Cohen's philosophy, something that in my view has still to receive adequate attention, despite the flourishing state of research on Cohen over the last few decades, my aim is not some kind of overstressed, comic apology. There will be no attempt to show that Cohen was a postmodern philosopher. He was in all respects a philosopher of modernity and a man of his time (though, in some ways, in his last years, showing some difficulty in following and interpreting the cultural changes of his time). It is rather a question of seeing whether, in the thought of a classic of modernity, like Hermann Cohen, there are useful references for contemporary philosophical thinking, in a new cultural context. This approach to the question, if it were to lead to positive results, could be of far greater importance than a clumsy recycling, or misinterpretation of his philosophy, since it could help to bring to light authentic traits of modernity which can still communicate with postmodernity, though still respecting the latter's true novelty.

I certainly do not intend to provide an exhaustive account of the question in these few pages. I am simply attempting to begin to posit it and point out certain themes, which, in my view, could and should be further developed and added to by others, in future research that I hope will be fruitfully carried on by both established and new Cohen scholars.

Although simplification and generalisation are inevitable, in my view, the philosophical core of postmodernism lies in thought on difference and it intends to leave behind thought of identity, the concept and representation. In my outline of the situation I shall refer to the theory worked out by Gilles Deleuze in *Différence et répétition*.[1] Certainly, other writers and theories could be mentioned, but my choice is not an arbitrary one.

Firstly, *Différence et répétition* is and has been acknowledged as one of the fundamental works for this new school of thought. Michel Foucault explicitly stated that Deleuze is to be credited with this new starting point: "a thunderbolt has

[1] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1968; Eng. trans. P. Patton, The Athlone Press, London 1994. Gilles Deleuze subsequently modified the theory presented here in other works and partially criticised his own previous views (cf. the author's note in the appendix to the Italian translation of G. DELEUZE, *Logique du sens* [Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1969], Italian trans. M. de Stefanis, Feltrinelli, Milano 1975, pp. 294f.). However, concerning the central themes, which will be the sole object of my attention here, this book remains a stable point of reference for Deleuze's thought and postmodern theory in general.

appeared, which will bear the name of Deleuze: new thought is now possible; thought itself is possible again.

Not thought to come, promised from the most distant point of new beginnings. It is here in Deleuze's texts, jumping up and dancing before us and among us."[2]

Secondly, Deleuze's theory has numerous, important aspects where problems develop in substantial, occasionally surprising, parallelism with those treated by Cohen. The latter thus becomes ideal comparison for my purpose in this essay.

In Deleuze's view, the error of traditional philosophy of difference, throughout its history "from Aristotle to Hegel via Leibniz,"[3] consists "in confusing the concept of difference with a merely conceptual difference, in remaining content to inscribe difference in the concept in general."[4] Philosophy continually tried to "save"[5] difference from its condition as a rebel and cursed insubordination in the face of identity turning to "reason" understood as "representation" capable of returning the anarchy and individualism of difference to the hierarchy and organicity of the concept. That *prius* which is in no way deducible and is the source of all production, "difference," where universal and particular were originatively joined, is reflectively submitted by representation to the identity of the concept and included in the general-particular organic relation, and thus distorted in its meaning.

In Deleuze's view there are four aspects of representative reduction and mediation, by means of which "reason" neutralises the strength and meaning of difference: "identity, in the form of the *undetermined* concept; analogy, in the relation between ultimate *determinable* concepts; opposition, in the relation between *determinations* within concepts; resemblance, in the *determined* object of the concept itself."[6]

Starting out from Aristotle (and this choice is undoubtedly significant), Deleuze showed how, thinking in terms of the general-particular relationship, representative reason organically includes difference in the identity of the generic concept as an element of specification, in various forms, among which opposition is "at once the greatest and the most perfect."[7] Thus difference becomes a predicate of the concept identical to itself. If one moves to the upper logical and ontological level of comparison between the genus or categories, where, owing to the non univocity of being, which cannot be considered itself a genus, difference cannot be understood as opposition, it is nevertheless returned by judgement to a form of identity, albeit weaker and more confused, i.e. analogy, and is thus still included in organic representation. In the other direction, towards the complete determination of the individual, specific differences are again included in the organicity of conceptual

[2] M. FOUCAULT, *Theatrum philosophicum*, in IDEM, *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, Édition établie sous la direction de Daniel Defert et François Ewald avec la collaboration de Jacques Lagrange, Gallimard, Paris 1994, vol. 2, p. 98.

[3] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 41; Eng. trans. cit., p. 27.

[4] *Ibidem*; cf. *ibid*., pp. 48, 71; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 32, 50.

[5] Cf. *ibid*., p. 45; Eng. trans. cit., p. 29.

[6] *Ibid*., pp. 44f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 29.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 45; Eng. trans. cit., p. 30. The reference is to ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* X, 4, 8 and 9.

representation as resemblances perceived among specific objects, which presuppose "a continuity of sensible intuition in the concrete representation."[8]

With this conceptual and representative reduction of difference Deleuze contrasts new thought capable of seeing difference in its authentic meaning, as the "state in which determination takes the form of unilateral distinction:"[9] "instead of something distinguished from something else – he wrote –, imagine something which distinguishes itself – and yet *that from which* it distinguishes itself does not distinguish itself from it."[10] In this authentic meaning it cannot be thought within organic representation, with subordinate reference to the identity of the concept and analogy of being. On the contrary, it catastrophically subverts, provoking "breaks of continuity in the series of resemblances (…) impassable fissures between the analogical structures."[11]

The new thought of difference must abandon the resemblance of representations, the identity of the concept and analogy of being, to affirm the absolute univocity of being, thinking, however, being not as a supreme genus, but as difference: "the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, *of* all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. It is 'equal' for all, but they themselves are not equal. It is said of all in a single sense, but they themselves do not have the same sense (…). Being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself."[12]

This, evidently, produces radically alternative thought to the organic form of representation: the distribution splitting up the spaces distributed by the concept is substituted by a nomadic distribution of differences, which are mobile and scattered over an unlimited open space. The hierarchy determined by resemblance in respect of the identical is substituted by the "crowned anarchy"[13] of the free unfolding of differences. To reach this, however, thought must consider difference without the mediation of representation: not as a subordinate element to be returned to the identity of the concept, but as the originative being, previous to identity and the concept; not as a predicate of the identical, but as being itself inasmuch as it is production, as the "*differenciator of difference*."[14] Deleuze wrote: "Repetition must be understood in the pronominal; we must find the Self of repetition, the singularity within that which repeats. (…) we must distinguish two forms of repetition. In every case repetition is difference without a concept. But in one case, the difference is taken to be only external to the concept; it is a difference between objects represented by the same concept, falling into the indifference of space and time. In the other case, the

[8] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 51; Eng. trans. cit., p. 34.

[9] *Ibid*., p. 43; Eng. trans. cit., p. 28.

[10] *Ibidem*.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 52; Eng. trans. cit., p. 35.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 53; Eng. trans. cit., p. 36.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 55 *passim*; Eng. trans. cit., p. 37 *passim*.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 48; Eng. trans. cit., p. 32.

difference is internal to the Idea; it unfolds as pure movement, creative of a dynamic space and time which correspond to the Idea."[15]

Briefly anticipating comparison with Cohen's thought which I shall deal with later, some significant assonances can already be noted, which are by no means extrinsic or extemporaneous. Deleuze himself made implicit reference when writing: "There are internal differences which dramatise an Idea before representing an object. Difference here is internal to an Idea, even though it be external to the concept which represents an object;"[16] and, continuing, with reference to Kant's acknowledgement of spatial differences irreducible to the concept, commented: "In other words, following certain neo-Kantian interpretations, there is a step-by-step, internal, dynamic construction of space which must precede the 'representation' of the whole as a form of exteriority. The element of this internal genesis seems to us to consist of intensive quantity rather than schema, and to be related to Ideas rather than to concepts of the understanding."[17] That the reference to "certain neo-Kantian interpretations" concerns precisely Hermann Cohen, becomes more explicit further on.[18]

In Deleuze's view, representative thought attempted alternative routes for understanding difference. Organic representation, which "by inscribing itself within the identical concept or within analogous concepts (…) only fixed the limits within which determination became difference,"[19] is substituted by "orgiastic representation,"[20] which actually thinks difference as "the extreme," the infinite, in the two senses as infinitely large and infinitely small. In orgiastic representation it really seems that thought abandons the purposes of reducing the excess of difference to the Apollonian calm of the organic form of the identity of the concept, to actually discover the "tumult, restlessness and passion"[21] of difference. Deleuze refers to the two different directions of Hegel's philosophy, on the one hand, and that of Leibniz, on the other. Hegel, through dialectical contradiction, elevated difference to the infinite: "In this manner – wrote Deleuze –, difference is pushed to the limit – that is, to the ground which is no less its return or its reproduction than its annihilation."[22] Leibniz, by means of the infinitely small, introduced infinite difference as the generator of the identity of essence.

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[15] *Ibid*., p. 36; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 23f.

[16] *Ibid*., pp. 39f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 26.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 40; Eng. trans. cit., p. 26.

[18] Cf. *ibid*., p. 298; Eng. trans. cit., p. 231. Actually Deleuze only appears to be acquainted with *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (cf. also G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 394; Eng. trans. cit., p. 336), and perhaps only by way of J. VUILLEMIN, *L'héritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne. Fichte – Cohen – Heidegger*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1954. Direct contact by Deleuze with Cohen's *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* would certainly have been interesting!

[19] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 61; Eng. trans. cit., p. 42.

[20] *Ibidem* and *passim*.

[21] *Ibidem*.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 65; Eng. trans. cit., p. 45.

With the introduction of the infinite in representation, the "limit" is no longer the limitation of the finite form, but the generating principle of infinite differences.[23] Nevertheless, orgiastic representation is still directed to mediation and reduction of difference to identity, no longer in the sense of organic representation, as reduction of the finite element to the principle of form, but rather as reduction of the infinite element to the principle as ground.[24] In infinite representation the principle, the concept, is no longer the genus, which includes and neutralises specific differences in its own identity, but is still the ground in which the differences converge. Deleuze wrote: "Infinite representation invokes a foundation. While this foundation is not the identical itself, it is nevertheless a way of taking the principle of identity particularly seriously, giving it an infinite value and rendering it coextensive with the whole, and in this manner allowing it to reign over existence itself. It matters little whether identity (as the identity of the world and the self) be considered analytic, in the form of the infinitely small, or synthetic, in the form of the infinitely large. In the former case, the foundation or sufficient reason is that which vice-dicts identity; in the latter case, it is that which contradicts it. In all cases, however, the foundation or sufficient reason employs the infinite only to lead the identical to *exist* its very identity."[25] To think difference as "unilateral distinction,"[26] it is necessary to remove it from representation and the concept, to think it before and independently of identity and opposition, analogy and resemblance. It is a question of thinking difference as an absolute, manifold, informal *prius*, pure intensity and power.[27] This also means thinking difference independently of negation, as more originative than the latter, as pure affirmation. It is clear that the models for this thought are Nietzsche's will to power and eternal return. Negation and contradiction are only epiphenomena of difference, which, in its originativeness and immediacy, is pure affirmation, intensity and power. Identity itself must be brought back to difference. For this reason "repetition" is the opposite of "representation:" "*Re*-petition opposes *re*-presentation: the prefix changes its meaning, since in the one case difference is said only in relation to the identical, while in the other it is the univocal which is said of the different."[28] Difference, in this originative meaning is the indeterminate principle of all determination, "the disparate [*dispars*],"[29] "to differing:" "Every object, every thing, must see its own identity swallowed up in difference, each being no more than a difference between differences. Difference must be shown *differing*."[30]

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[23] Cf. *ibid*., p. 62; Eng. trans. cit., p. 43.

[24] Cf. *ibid*., p. 63; Eng. trans. cit., p. 43.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 70; Eng. trans. cit., p. 49.

[26] Cf. *ibid*., p. 43; Eng. trans. cit., p. 28.

[27] In *Différence et répétition* Deleuze, when stating the originativeness of difference, also continually uses expressions concerning "depth" (cf. *ibid*., p. 72 *passim*; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 50f. *passim*), which I shall not deal with here, since this is one of the aspects he later rejected and abandoned (cf. *supra*, note 1).

[28] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 80; Eng. trans. cit., p. 57.

[29] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 80, 157; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 57, 121.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 79; Eng. trans. cit., p. 56.

In his attempt to formulate a radically new thought of difference, Deleuze had to face up to Plato's philosophy. Michel Foucault correctly identified an essential characteristic of Deleuze's philosophy in its "overturned Platonism."[31] The general confrontation of postmodern philosophy with Plato is a theme of primary importance for understanding the former. Here I shall only take a brief glance at this, only with reference to Deleuze, taken as a paradigm of postmodernism with whom to compare Cohen's perspective. Foucault is even more radical: "Overturn Platonism: is there any philosophy which has not tried to do so?",[32] adding: "All philosophies, especially the 'anti-Platonaceous' ones?"[33] This rhetorical question seems exaggerated to me, though Foucault himself explains it in far greater detail, showing how this anti-Platonism itself testifies to the profound links of all philosophy with Plato.[34] There have, actually, been philosophies desiring to follow Plato, differentiate themselves from him, confirm or refute him, interpret him better than the original or overturn him. What is certain is that there are philosophical classics which are always worth approaching, then we have Plato and Kant, who must necessarily be taken into account. Postmodernism cannot avoid this rule either. So Deleuze intended to overturn Platonism; "that this overturning should conserve many Platonic characteristics – he admitted – is not only inevitable but desirable."[35] It was Plato, actually, who began the thought of identity and representation, but, for this very reason, he was also the philosopher in whom the irreducibility of difference was still present; he was "the origin or at the crossroads of a decision:"[36] he authentically thought difference and repetition, though the result of his thought was identity and representation: "It is like an animal in the process of being tamed, whose final resistant movements bear witness better than they would in a state of freedom to a nature soon to be lost: the Heraclitan world still growls in Platonism. With Plato, the issue is still in doubt: mediation has not yet found its ready-made movement."[37]

Deleuze's first aim then, before the overturning, was the rediscovery of the true Plato, the one Aristotle had not understood faithfully,[38] the Plato of dialectics. Plato certainly did not see dialectics as a process of division and mediation, which must lead to genus specification, by means of subordination of difference to the concept of representation. This is how dialectics had been conceived from Aristotle onwards reaching its most glorious climax with Hegel. Plato, on the other hand, saw dialectics as a genetic process of *purification*, in which difference acts as the originative

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[31] M. FOUCAULT, *op.cit.*, p. 77. Deleuze himself often stated that it was his intention to overturn Platonism: cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 91f. *passim*; Eng. trans. cit., p. 66 *passim*.

[32] M. FOUCAULT, *op.cit*., p.76.

[33] *Ibidem.*

[34] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 76f.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 82; Eng. trans. cit., p. 59.

[36] *Ibid*., p. 341; Eng. trans. cit., p. 263.

[37] *Ibid*., p. 83; Eng. trans. cit., p. 59.

[38] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 83f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 59f.

power, which, in the chaos without identity of the question, generates and selects Idea as a problem.[39] "The Idea – wrote Deleuze – is not yet the concept of an object which submits the world to the requirements of representation, but rather a brut presence which can be invoked in the world only in function of that which is not 'representable' in things. The Idea has therefore not yet chosen to relate difference to the identity of a concept in general: it has not given up hope of finding a pure concept of difference in itself."[40] Plato's idea is not the identical, but rather difference, and the purpose of dialectics is not mediation, which reduces difference to the identical, but selection producing pure difference: "it is a question not of identifying but of authenticating."[41]

So Idea is not being as the stable, ingenerated principle, like the identity of the concept representing the differences in itself, but the problematisation of being, the constantly further question "what is X?",[42] which must produce the identity of being itself as authenticity and affirm it, denying (i.e. annihilating) its simulacra, its false claimants: "The one problem which recurs throughout Plato's philosophy is the problem of measuring rivals and selecting claimants. This problem of distinguishing between *things and their simulacra* within a pseudo-genus or a large species presides over his classification of the arts and sciences. It is a question of making the difference, thus of operating in the depths of the immediate, a dialectic of the immediate. It is a dangerous trial without thread and without net, for according to the ancient custom of myth and epic, false claimants must die."[43]

Plato thought being as difference, or rather as different, in the sense that difference is more originative than being; it is its ground. Platonic dialectics is dialectics of Idea, previous to the being of the concept, which is rather its infinite task as problem. In this sense Idea is rather non-being, in the problematic, founding meaning of the negative: "Being is also non-being, *but non-being is not the being of the negative*; rather, it is the being of the problematic, the being of problem and question."[44] There are some very significant passages in Deleuze on this, in the literal meaning of the text, in their striking similarity to Cohen's writings. Here are just two examples: "In this sense, it turns out that the infinitive, the *esse*, designates less a proposition than the interrogation to which the proposition is supposed to respond. This (non)-being is the differential element in which affirmation, as multiple affirmation, finds the principle of its genesis. As for negation, this is only the shadow of the highest principle, the shadow of the difference alongside the affirmation produced."[45] In his *Conclusion* Deleuze wrote: "We have seen that Ideas are

[39] On the Platonic Idea, and in general on thought as a problem, cf. *ibid*., pp. 198ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 153ff. On the relationship between "question" and "problem," cf. *ibid*., pp. 251ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 195ff.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 83; Eng. trans. cit., p. 59.

[41] *Ibid*., pp. 84f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 60.

[42] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 242f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 187f.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 85; Eng. trans. cit., p. 60; cf. *ibid*., pp. 349f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 272.

[44] *Ibid*., p. 89; Eng. trans. cit., p. 64.

[45] *Ibidem*.

genuine objectivities, made up of differential elements and relations and provided with a specific mode – namely, the 'problematic.' Problems thus defined do not designate any ignorance on the part of a thinking subject, any more than they express a conflict, but rather objectively characterise the nature of Ideas as such. There is indeed, therefore, a *μὴ ὄν*, which must not be confused with the *οὐκ ὄν*, and which means the being of the problematic and not the being of the negative: an expletive NE rather than the negative 'not.' This *μὴ ὄν* is so called because it precedes all affirmation, but is none the less completely positive."[46]

These are the "Platonic characteristics" which, in Deleuze's view, it is "desirable to conserve."[47] Overturning Platonism, on the other hand, concerns its result. Deleuze wrote: "the whole of Platonism (…) is dominated by the idea of drawing a distinction between 'the thing itself' and the simulacra."[48] The Same, the One of Idea, is certainly not the identity of the concept: it is rather the unity of ground. Nevertheless, according to Deleuze, "it is difficult to see what its effect is if not to make that which is grounded 'identical,' to use difference in order to make the identical exist."[49] Therefore, the result of Platonism is, in the end, thought as identity and representation, and the overturning of Platonism, the authentic thought of difference, consists in the elimination of the ground, in "ungrounding,"[50] which removes difference from the representation of the relationship between the thing itself and the simulacra, recognising its full power, completely immanent in the very simulacra, substituting the representation of the Same with repetition, the eternal return of the different in the simulacra: "Difference is not thought in itself but related to a ground, subordinated to the same and subject to mediation in mythic form. Overturning Platonism, then, means denying the primacy of original over copy, of model over image; glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflections."[51]

To explain the result of Plato's thought and the need to overturn it, Deleuze introduced a crucial theme: the ethical inspiration of this "decision." The affirmation of the Same as ground in Plato reflects the dominant requirement of his thought: distinguishing true from false appearances, copies from simulacra. It is from this and nothing else that the whole of Platonism developed as representative thought.[52] Now, this requirement is an ethical prejudice, will of form and truth profoundly inspiring the Platonic theory of the Idea: "Plato inaugurates and initiates because he evolves with a theory of Ideas which *will* allow the deployment of representation. In his case, however, a moral motivation in all its purity is avowed: the will to eliminate simulacra or phantasms has no motivation apart from the moral. What is condemned in the figure of simulacra is the state of free, oceanic differences, of nomadic distributions and crowned anarchy, along with all that malice which challenges both

[46] *Ibid*., p. 343; Eng. trans. cit., p. 267.

[47] Cf. *supra*, note 35.

[48] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 91; Eng. trans. cit., p. 66.

[49] *Ibidem*.

[50] *Ibid*., p. 92; Eng. trans. cit., p. 67.

[51] *Ibid*., pp. 91f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 66.

[52] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 340f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 264f.

the notion of the model and that of the copy. Later, the world of representation will more or less forget its moral origin and presuppositions. These will nevertheless continue to act in the distinction between the originary and the derived, the original and the sequel, the ground and the grounded, which animates the hierarchies of a representative theology by extending the complementarity between model and copy."[53]

This, in my view is an extremely important point also for comparison with Cohen's philosophy. But let as put aside, for the moment, this question to make our first comparison with Cohen on the basis of what has been dealt with so far and supply an initial answer to the question asked at the outset: whether Cohen's philosophy can be a significant reference point for postmodern thought or whether, on the other hand, it belongs to those philosophies which have no right of citizenship in the latter.

We can start out from Cohen's interpretation of Plato, with which that of Deleuze shows unsuspected similarities.[54] For Cohen, Plato was the philosopher of pure thought as the foundation of being. He turned to and unified the Eleatic, Pythagorean and Socratic traditions, producing the theory of Ideas as the theory of the grounding of being in thought. In *Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik*,[55] the work inaugurating his mature interpretation of Plato, Cohen showed how the Eleatic tradition reached full maturity in the Platonic theory of Ideas. Parmenides had affirmed the fundamental principle, in accordance with which "there is no other being than that of thought,"[56] and Democritus had investigated this being of thought, this "true being" (*ἐτεῇ ὄν*) as a "non-being" (*μὴ ὄν*). Democritus had taken this crucial step, because he had profited from Pythagoras' reflection on mathematics: "Now there is a being which the Eleatics consider a non-being; this is the true being! This true being consists of mathematical concepts, not only as regards atoms, but also the abstraction of a separator, in the thought of an interval (*Zwischen*), or of a distance (*Abstand*), in which sensible beings are no longer present."[57]

As can be seen, if it were acceptable to express Cohen's thought using terminology different from his, it would not be much of a problem to see his recognition of the Platonic theory of Ideas as "thought of difference," inasmuch as the Platonic

[53] *Ibid*., p. 341; Eng. trans. cit., p. 265.

[54] I shall restrict myself here to a few short remarks. For more detail analysis see my book on Cohen (A. POMA, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Mursia, Milano 1988), Eng. trans. by John Denton, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York 1997) and my essay on: *Plato's Idea of the Good and its Different Interpretations by Cohen and Natorp*, in chapter 2 of my book: *Yearning for Form and Other Essays on Hermann Cohen's Thought*, Springer, Dordrecht 2006, pp. 21–42. There is a highly analytic study of the Marburg School's interpretation of Plato by K.-H. LEMBECK, *Platon in Marburg. Platonrezeption und Philosophiegeschichtsphilosophie bei Cohen und Natorp*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 1994.

[55] H. COHEN, *Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik*, in IDEM, *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte*, 2 Bde., hg. von Albert Görland und Ernst Cassirer, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1928, Bd. 1., pp. 336–366.

[56] *Ibid*., p. 337.

[57] *Ibid*., pp. 340f.

Idea is precisely that non-being which it is necessary to address to justify being. Thus Plato can take a decisive step in development of the Socratic concept. The concept, which is not the reply to the question "what is it?" (*τί ἐστι*), but rather the question itself;[58] it is not the principle, but the task. The Idea as pure thought "justifies" the concept, grounding being in non-being: "*Idea became the justification of concept*, in the sense that thought laid its own foundation on it. '*Giving account*' (*λόγον διδόναι*) and *laying foundation* (*ὑποτίθεσθαι*) *become synonyms*. Logos is the same concept. But when it becomes logos by itself, then it becomes self-foundation. And this foundation of Idea means and guarantees the true *being*. There is no truth, no knowledge, no being beyond this, just as on this side there is no being and no science."[59]

Therefore Cohen rejected any ontological or psychological interpretation of the Platonic Idea. Neither separate entities, following the misinterpretation begun by Aristotle, nor psychic ones, but "non-entities," "hypothesis," "method" for grounding being in thought. Thus Plato's theory of Ideas is not at all speculative ontology, but the true origin of critical and transcendental philosophy, the method of hypothesis, dialectics, not as a technique of division of the genus in the species, but the genetic process of the production of being in thought. Pure thought, the Idea, "hypothesis," "non-being," is the "true being;" dialectics is the very movement of Idea, which as "difference," we could say, produces the being of knowledge. Thus Platonic dialectics, which is true knowledge, inasmuch as it is pure thought, has nothing to do with representation: "In his critique of knowledge Plato's task was to bring about such a drastic separation as to put the thought of knowledge entirely on one side, while he put *representation* on the side of sensation. One ought to believe that representation also partakes of thought, or rather thought of representation. But Plato makes a clean divide and, to all intents and purposes, assigns representation to sensation."[60]

For Cohen another fundamental stage in the development of a philosophy of pure thought was, as is well known, Leibniz's theory of the infinitesimal. The differential and intensive, to which Deleuze devoted so much attention in the thought of difference,[61] were also fundamental concepts of pure thought for Cohen. Leibniz has the merit of grounding the reality of being in the true being of intensity, quantity in the infinitesimal of the differential. But even more meritorious is his conception and elaboration of these notions and method in the sphere of mathematics and physics, starting from a purely philosophical methodological principle: that of continuity: "*Continuity became the higher concept, from which infinity derives* (…).

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[58] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1902, 1914[2]; the latter edition was reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Georg Olms, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York, Bd. 6., 1977, p. 378.

[59] *Ibid.,* p. 211.

[60] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1904, 1907[2]; the latter edition was reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bd 7., p. 113.

[61] Apart from the already quoted pages, cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., chap. 4.

Continuity, inasmuch as it is *Idea*, and inasmuch as it is *law*, is now a principle both of *reason* and of *nature*."[62]

Only in the light of Plato's and Leibniz's lessons can Kant's transcendental method be understood, and, even more, Cohen's profound revision of it. This revision, which headed in the direction of a clear break off from the thought of representation, even in respect of the remnants of the latter in Kant's theory of knowledge was possible for Cohen thanks to the elaboration of pure thought as "hypothesis," in the Platonic sense of "Idea," and "continuity," in Leibniz's sense of the entirely pure origin of being in thought. The radical reform of Kant's "synthesis" is understandable in this perspective, of which the grounding of space in the intensive, which Deleuze specifically attributed to Cohen,[63] is merely one aspect.

What, in Cohen's view must be overcome in the purification of Kant's transcendental philosophy is reference to the *given* of intuition: "*So to thought preceding an* intuition. This is also pure, and therefore close to thought. But thought starts off in something *outside* itself. This is where the weakness in Kant's grounding lies. Here lies the reason for the early defections in his school.

(…) Returning to the historical ground of critique, we will not allow a theory of sensibility to precede logic. *We begin with thought*. Thought can have no origin outside itself, if its purity must be unlimited and not obscured. Pure thought in itself and only from itself must produce pure knowledge. Therefore, the theory of thought must become the theory of knowledge."[64]

Seeing knowledge as anything different from representation means seeing it as pure thought and the theory of knowledge as "logic:" "Thought is not representation, even if a logical attribute were conferred on the latter, seeing it as true representation (…). *The creative force of thought* (…) *can only be revealed by logic*."[65] Nevertheless, for the separation of thought from representation, for the formulation of a logic of pure thought, a statement of intention is not enough; what is needed is radical philosophical re-elaboration, since the collusion between thought and representation is deeply rooted and influential, in numerous ways and must be carefully eliminated.[66]

First of all there is a metaphysical aspect, for which the Aristotle was initially responsible. In his view, logic has an entirely formal character, inasmuch as the entities, the objects of knowledge, have an independent ontological status and are "given" to consciousness through perception: "The mistaken opinion that thought, inasmuch as it is unification, consists in the formation of *orders* lies in the

[62] H. COHEN, *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte. Ein Kapitel zur Grundlegung der Erkenntnisskritik*, Dümmler, Berlin 1883, repr. in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bd. 5./I. 1984, pp. 57f.

[63] Cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 298; Eng. trans. cit., p. 231.

[64] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., pp. 12f.

[65] *Ibid*., p. 23.

[66] Cf. *ibidem.*

fundamental prejudice that *sensation* supplies thought with its material and that the latter must only elaborate this material."[67]

On the contrary, thinking knowledge as pure thought means seeing it as pure activity, production of its own content: "It is in this determined meaning that we take the statement *that activity produces content.* The whole, inseparable content of thought must be production of thought. And it is the very, inseparable activity of thought that constitutes the content. The concept of pure thought requires this unity of production and product. The relationship of thought with knowledge required and encouraged this meaning of thought."[68]

Rigorous grounding of knowledge in pure thought does not only mean the conception of the content of knowledge as a "product" (*Erzeugnis*) of thought (which would still be, as Deleuze correctly saw, a more refined form of "representation" as reduction to "ground"), but also recognition of the unity of the "product" with the activity of "producing" (*Erzeugung*), which is thought itself: "for this reason the figured expression of 'producing' cannot harm the characteristic of thought, because, when producing, what counts is not so much the product as the very activity of producing. *Production itself is the product*. In thought, it is not so much a case of constituting what is thought, inasmuch as this is considered something already accomplished, removed outside itself by thought; rather thought itself is the purpose and object of its own activity. This activity does not transfer to anything; it does not go outside itself. Inasmuch as it reaches the end it is over and ceases to be a problem. It is what is thought itself and what is thought is nothing beyond thought."[69]

So it is not a still representative strategy of bringing the manifold back to the identity of "ground," but of radically thinking "foundation" as the irreducible, problematic, hypothesis. "Grounds are *foundations*,"[70] wrote Cohen, who, so as to avoid any representative ambiguity, also put aside the metaphor of "production" and "product," preferring instead "*thought of origin*."[71]

Another, psychological aspect of representative thought, which must be overcome, is linked to all this. Thought is generally seen as "connection:"[72] In Cohen's view, this takes place as the result of a mistaken psychologistics of thought, as an organising activity of consciousness. In this sense the "synthesis" of thought is understood as reduction of the manifold to unity, as "composition" (*Zusammensetzung*).[73] This is ambiguous, and, as we have already said, even Kant was not immune: the synthesis is "synthesis of unity," but with given manifoldness as its presupposition.[74] The logic of pure thought, on the other hand, needs to be able to see thought as the origin of all content of knowledge, even of the manifold, and

[67] *Ibid*., p. 58.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 59.
[69] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[70] *Ibid*., p. 528.
[71] Cf. *ibid.,* p. 36.
[72] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 23f.
[73] Cf. *ibid*., p. 26.
[74] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 26f.

thus must put aside all psychological contamination, every representation of the procedure of consciousness,[75] to comprehend the pure movement of thought itself, as activity and production, the dialectical movement of the Idea, as understood by Plato:[76] true dialectics of the Idea as a "problem," where, unlike that of Hegel, negation is not contradiction, but origin, and the process does not constitute mediation, but infinite tension.[77] The true dialectics of thought, in Cohen's view, does not consist, like Hegel's, in a "*dialectical movement of concepts*, which takes place in the 'overturning of opposites,'"[78] nor in their "arbitrary exchange" in a continuous follow on, still showing "psychological interest in the process of the consciousness of thought,"[79] but in "correlation" between "separation" (*Sonderung*) and "unification" (*Vereinigung*), which constitutes the movement of thought.[80] "Correlation" between "separation" and "unification" is the authentically logical, not representative meaning of "synthesis" as the "synthesis of unity:"[81] it is "conservation" (*Erhaltung*)[82] of separation and unification. The unity of separation and unification understood as "correlation," i.e. as "conservation," not only evidently refers back to Platonic dialectics, is unbridgeable difference from Hegel's dialectics and the psychology of the representative process, but also expresses the fundamental character of pure thought as hypothesis and foundation, the infinite problematic tension characterising it. In Cohen's words: "*There is no exchange, but conservation, at the same time, of separation and unification*. Unification is conserved in separation and separation in unification (…). Therefore, it is to be expected *that unity be conserved in manifoldness and manifoldness in unity*."[83]

The paradox of correlation, as an authentic movement of thought, is only apparent and also attributable to psychological overturning of the conception of thought as representation. Only if the synthesis of thought is seen as mediation accomplished by the different manifold in the unity of the identical, can separation and

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[75] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 59f.

[76] Cf. *ibid*., p. 20.

[77] It is significant, taking into account the necessary differences, which I shall highlight later, Deleuze also referred to this "true dialectics" of the Platonic Idea as a "problem," in contrast with Hegel's dialectics: cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 83, 209, 212f., 234ff., 243f., 344f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 59, 161, 163f., 181f., 188, 268.

[78] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., p. 113.

[79] Cf. *ibid*., p. 61.

[80] On the specific, fundamental meaning of Cohen's "correlation" and its radical difference from Hegel's dialectics, the following is still of crucial importance: J. GORDIN, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie des unendlichen Urteils*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1929.

[81] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., p. 61.

[82] Cf. *ibidem*. When formulating this notion of "conservation," Cohen took as his model the law of the conservation of energy (cf. *ibid*., pp. 70ff.). He actually and explicitly saw thought as energy ("may *the energy of thought* come to the fore in stimulating this alternation:" *ibid*., p. 61; my italics). There is also a significant analogy with Deleuze's thought of difference. Over the meaning of the notion of "energy" there is also considerable divergence between the two philosophers, which I shall deal with later, making this analogy more apparent than real.

[83] *Ibid*., p. 62.

differentiation be nothing but resolved, or rather always be resolved, in identity. But if thought is freed of all psychological-representative aspects and restored to the purity of its logical movement, if it is removed from the present of the given and representation (which, actually, is an ever accomplished past) and placed in the correct future perspective (Cohen himself pointed out that it is not a case of categories of time, but of logical dimensions)[84] of the problem of an infinite task, the apparent contradiction disappears: "That is, in the direction of separation, we think of the *act*, which is fulfilled, and inasmuch as it is fulfilled. The same is true of unification. And, concerning content, the act is, therefore, considered to have reached *fulfilment*. Correspondingly, we think of the respective contents as concluded. This is where the error lies. Both activities, just like their contents, must not settle in a present, but incline towards the future, in relation to the future, starting from the present. Unification must not be thought as an event, whose fulfilment has been reached, but as a *task* and the ideal of a task, in the way that only logic can posit such a task, and formulate such an ideal. The task that is posited to thought in judgement can never be considered to have come to rest, to have been fulfilled.

The situation is the same for separation. *Both directions rise in the future* (*heben sich in die Zukunft hinein*). Separation, which can never be thought as concluded, with this remains unification. Unification remains in it. And unification, which can never be thought as accomplished, in this way conserves itself as separation. Thus, by means of *conservation*, the co-penetration of the two directions can be understood. *Both directions are tasks and must incessantly remain tasks.* But only logic can posit and resolve these tasks."[85]

Pure thought must also be freed from cooperation with representation under a third, grammatical, heading. The double meaning of the Greek word *λόγος*, as thought and word, had already led Aristotle to identify judgement with proposition and understand logic as "general grammar."[86] The categorical judgement model "S is P," for example, clearly shows this ambiguity and reduction of logical judgement to a mere formal rule of the relationship of a predicate with a given subject. But the logic of pure thought is one of judgement, not of propositions, and judgement is not a relationship between given contents, but the origin of content. In Cohen's words: "It is a mistake to use, for *categorical* judgement, inasmuch as it is judgement of substance, the formula S is P. S is not P, but S is S *for* P; more exactly, S is *x for* P (…). Thus it immediately becomes clear that S cannot mean a determined content, but only the *presupposition* for this content; more precisely, for the *determination of the content*. The formula S is P came about from the confusion of judgement with proposition. As though categorical judgement did not exist for any other reason than for representing, or at most, preforming the articulation of the *proposition* in subject and predicate."[87]

[84] Cf. *ibid*., p. 63.

[85] *Ibid*., pp. 64f.

[86] Cf. *ibid*., p. 14.

[87] *Ibid*., pp. 537f.

Judgement, purified of all representative and grammatical implications, is the "origin" of knowledge, and thus also that of the content of knowledge. Therefore it is, above all, infinite judgement: "Infinite judgement is the judgement of origin."[88] Infinite judgement has been severely misunderstood and distorted in its fundamental importance[89] owing to ambiguity over the meaning of negation. Since being is not principle, but must be led back to an origin in thought, thought, then, is "non-being," not, however, in the sense of absolute negation (*Nicht*) or contradiction, but as "relative nothing (*Nichts*),"[90] constituting the "true passage"[91] (*Übergang*) to something.

The distinction between absolute negation (*οὐκ*) and the relative, productive negation of being (*μὴ*), dealt with by Deleuze,[92] was, long before, a fundamental passage of Cohen's logic of pure thought.

Thought is judgement inasmuch as it is origin; it is origin inasmuch as it is problem, hypothesis. In Cohen's words: "*What is it?* (*τί ἐστι*), asked *Socrates*, and in this question formulated concept. *What was being?* (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*), asked *Aristotle*, making this question the crux of his metaphysical terminology. Thus the logical meaning of a question, inasmuch as it is the lever of origin, is shown in these famous examples. The lesser of a sentence the question is, the more important is its meaning as a type of judgement. It is the outset of knowledge. The corresponding affect is wonder. It is with wonder that Plato had philosophy begin. Thus, *question is the foundation of judgement*, one could say, the fundamental foundation stone."[93]

Thus thought, for Cohen, was not representation but production, origin and problem. Consequently, it was not even reduction to identity. Identity and contradiction were certainly "laws of thought" (*Denkgesetze*) for him, but in no way absolute principles. Since being is only inasmuch as its origin lies in thought as "non-being," foundation and method, thought does not presupposes no given, while all content presupposes it as origin: "If A counts as a sign of the simplest content, then, first of all, one must ask: *whence this A?* One cannot begin to act with this A and only subsequently attempt to confirm its validity. Such a posteriori efforts cannot lead to any decisive result, but can be seen as suspect symptoms of the fact that at the outset legitimate progress was impossible. As soon as A appears, the legitimacy of its origin must be investigated."[94]

Identity is the subsequent passage of pure thought, for which it affirms its content. So Identity is also judgement, as "affirmative judgement." It is not a question,

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[88] H. COHEN, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Dümmler, Berlin 1871, 1885[2]; Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1918[3]; repr. in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bd. 1./I-III, p. 790.

[89] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., pp. 86f., 89f. On this cf. J. GORDIN, *op.cit.*

[90] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., p. 93; cf. *ibid*., pp. 104f.

[91] *Ibid*., p. 91.

[92] Cf. *supra*, pp. 10f.

[93] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., pp. 83f.

[94] *Ibid*., p. 82.

as in representative thought, of a proposition which, in accordance with Aristotle's conception, establishes the correspondence of the true with itself: A is A, A=A. It is rather one of the affirmation of the content produced by thought in its uniqueness before any comparison. I do not think it is stretching things too far to note the analogy with Deleuze's definition of difference as "the state of determination as unilateral distinction."[95] Cohen wrote: "It is not a question of linking here, but rather one of *separating*. And, as a consequence, a statement does not merely mean establishing, but, at the same time, *keeping stable*. A cannot disappear, even though, and because, agreements with other elements must be produced and made possible."[96]

Thus affirmative judgement as "assurance (*Affirmatio*)"[97] of the identity of content further marks the distance between pure thought as idea and representation: "A is A, and remains A, however many times it is thought. However many times it is thought, *or rather, however many times it is represented*. It is only thought as the *sole* identity. Its repetitions are psychic processes, its logical content persisting in identity."[98]

Similarly, the "law of thought" of contradiction is also a judgement of pure thought: the "judgement of contradiction." It is a question of negation, this time absolute negation, the "annihilation" (*Vernichtung*) of the "false claimants" mentioned by Deleuze with reference to Plato,[99] no longer, however, in representation, but in the very internal dialectics of Idea: "The most important of the rights of judgement is that of rejecting and annihilating false judgement. It is in this annulment, or better annihilation, that the authentic, true 'nothing' of 'not' consists (...). Being able to posit the *requirement of annihilation* in itself is the vital question of judgement.

The 'no' expressed by this requirement, is completely different from that 'nothing,' which is the source of something. It is the activity of judgement; it is judgement itself, that does not acknowledge this right and value in a content that insists (*sich anmaßt*) on becoming content of judgement. The presumed *non-A* is decidedly not already a content. Rather it only claims (*beansprucht*) to be one. Negation however, denies it this value. *There is no non-A*, and there cannot be a non-A, which, in contrast with the nothing of origin, has a fulfilled content."[100]

Lastly, Cohen's logic of pure thought is radically different from the representative, totalitarian logic of concept as identity to which all differences are reduced. Rather, in Cohen's view, the concept of the object is the horizon, the task towards which all the judgements of knowledge converge.[101] It is not the reductive identity of differences nor the closed totality entirely enveloping it, but the infinite openness of the problem, which produces differences in the organic, but open framework of

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[95] Cf. *supra*, p. 6.

[96] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., p. 100.

[97] *Ibid*., p. 96.

[98] *Ibidem.*

[99] Cf. *supra*, p. 10.

[100] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., pp. 106f.

[101] Cf. *ibid*., p. 325.

the system: "This is the profound, eternal meaning, in which *Socrates* defined his concept as the question: What is it? (*τί ἐστι*). *Concept is a question and remains one*, nothing but a question. *The answer it incorporates must be a new question*, must provoke a new question. This is the intimate methodical relationship between question and answer: that every question must itself be an answer. Therefore, every answer can and must be a question. What is realised in the system of concept is a new kind of reciprocal conditioning or action: *reciprocal action between question and answer*. No solution can be definitive. Concept *is not an absolute totality*."[102]

What has been discussed so far has been limited to the analogies between Cohen's philosophy and Deleuze's thought of difference, simply because attention has not yet been focused on the profound differences in the two directions of thought followed. As I pointed out at the beginning, the first objective was to show that Cohen's philosophy does not belong of the representative thought radically rejected by postmodern culture, and which, for this reason, cannot occupy a place in contemporary debate. When doing so the actual analogies with Deleuze's philosophy came very much to the fore. Now the second objective must be followed, i.e. to show the specificity of a philosophical perspective linked to Hermann Cohen in the postmodern context. With this in mind, it will be possible and necessary to highlight the profound differences of this perspective from other directions of postmodern thought and, in particular, from that of Deleuze, chosen here for comparison.

So, let us return to the main point, where we had temporarily suspended examination of Deleuze's theory, i.e. on the "moral motivation" inspiring the whole of Plato's philosophy, whose abandonment and rejection is the fundamental step in overturning Plato for Deleuze.[103] In Deleuze's view, in Plato "everything culminates in the great principle: that there is – before all else, and despite everything – an affinity or a filiation – or perhaps it should be called a philiation – of thought with the true; in short, a good nature and a good desire, grounded in the last instance upon the *form of analogy in the Good*. As a result (…) Plato (…) was also the first to erect the dogmatic and moralising image of thought."[104] Overturning Platonism, setting up a new thought of difference for Deleuze above all meant rejecting this presupposition.

Even when philosophy puts forward a beginning, without presuppositions, it finds itself moving forward on the basis of implicit, subjective presuppositions, of which it never gives account, but which deeply and originatively influence every stage in its development. It is worth pointing out that Deleuze noted the distinction between "objective" and "subjective" presuppositions, not only on the basis of the explicit or implicit character of either, but also, in this connection, on the basis of their conceptual or sentimental character: the objective presuppositions are "concepts explicitly presupposed by a given concept;" the subjective ones, on the other

[102] *Ibid*., p. 378.

[103] Cf. *supra*, pp. 11f.

[104] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 185; Eng. trans. cit., p. 142.

hand, are "implicit (…) contained in feelings rather than concepts (*enveloppés dans un sentiment au lieu de l'être dans un concept*)."[105]

Throughout its history and in all its directions, philosophy of representation has always been grounded in the "presupposition that there is a natural capacity for thought endowed with a talent for truth or an affinity with the true, under the double aspect of a *good will on the part of the thinker* and an *upright nature on the part of thought* (…). The most general form of representation is thus found in the element of a common sense understood as an upright nature and a good will."[106] This "claimed affinity with the true," constituting *φιλία*, as an implicit, prejudicial element in philosophy,[107] determines its knowledge as "recognition," i.e. as "harmonious exercise of all the faculties upon a supposed same object,"[108] as "common sense."[109] Therefore, philosophy, which was born with the claim to constitute an alternative to opinion, common sense, *δόξα*, is, on the other hand, its permanent, systematic confirmation; it is orthodoxy: "the supposed three levels – a naturally upright thought, an in principle natural common sense, and a transcendental model of recognition – can constitute only an ideal orthodoxy. Philosophy is left without means to realise its project of breaking with *doxa* (…). The image of thought is only the figure in which *doxa* is universalised by being elevated to the rational level."[110]

Inasmuch as philosophy is constitutively "recognition" and "orthodoxy," it is inevitably conservative and reactionary: "What is recognised is not only an object but also the values attached to an object (…). In so far as the practical finality of the recognition lies in the 'established values,' then on this model the whole image of thought as *Cogitatio natura* bears witness to a disturbing complacency. As Nietzsche says, Truth may well seem to be 'a more modest being from which no disorder and nothing extraordinary is to be feared: a self-contented and happy creature which is continually assuring all the powers that be that no one needs to be the least concerned on its account; for it is, after all, only 'pure knowledge'… What is a thought which harms no one, neither thinkers nor anyone else? Recognition is a sign of the celebration of monstrous nuptials, in which thought 'rediscovers' the State, rediscovers 'the Church' and rediscovers all the current values that it subtly presented in the pure form of an eternally blessed unspecified eternal object."[111]

All this is opposed by the thought of difference, as "pure thought,"[112] "without presuppositions," that "effectively begins and effectively repeats."[113] Actually, the thought of difference proposed by Deleuze also starts out from implicit, or subjective

[105] Cf. *ibid.,* p. 169; Eng. trans. cit., p. 129 (the English translation has been modified, "feelings" substituting "opinions").

[106] *Ibid*., p. 171; Eng. trans. cit., p. 131.

[107] Cf. *ibid*., p. 181; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

[108] *Ibid*., p. 174; Eng. trans. cit., p. 133.

[109] Cf. *ibid*., p. 175; Eng. trans. cit., p. 133.

[110] *Ibid*., pp. 175f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 134.

[111] *Ibid*., p. 177; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 135f.

[112] Cf. *ibid*., p. 174; Eng. trans. cit., p. 133.

[113] Cf. *ibid*., p. 171; Eng. trans. cit., p. 130.

presuppositions, i.e. of the sentimental, not conceptual kind. It opposes orthodox philosophy because it is propelled by "ill will;"[114] it is termed "misosophy,"[115] is a "radical critique" of orthodoxy,[116] which is not merely posited as "local scepticism,"[117] still involved in dialectic interest in recognition, but as irreducible, anarchic novelty.[118] The new thought is generated as an event of mere strength, an act of violence,[119] which, in opposition to the good will and common sense of orthodox thought, does not bring about the convergence of the different faculties for recognition of a common object, but unilaterally directs each faculty to its excess, to its "transcendental exercise," where difference is received as the uncontainable origin of every content: the insensible *sentiendum* of sensibility, the unthinkable *cogitandum* of thought etc. "The violence of that which forces thought – wrote Deleuze – develops from the *sentiendum* to the *cogitandum*. Each faculty is unhinged, but what are the hinges if not the form of a common sense which causes all the faculties to function and converge? Each one, in its own order and on its own account, has broken the form of common sense which kept it within the empirical element of *doxa*, in order to attain its 'nth' power and the paradoxical element within transcendental exercise. Rather than all the faculties converging and contributing to a common project of recognising an object, we see divergent projects in which, with regard to what concerns it essentially, each faculty is in the presence of that which is its 'own.' Discord of the faculties, chain of force and fuse along which each confronts its limit, receiving from (or communicating to) the other only a violence which brings it face to face with its own element, as though with its disappearance or its perfection (*comme de son disparate ou de son incomparable*)."[120]

In this excessive, transcendent use of the faculties, the new thought opposes the common sense of orthodox philosophy and takes up the paradox, the "para-sense," which "determines only the communication between disjointed faculties."[121] It is in this movement of the thought of difference that "overturning of Platonism" basically consists, in the rejection of ground or "ungrounding" (*effondement*).[122] Representative thought is oriented, on the one hand, towards "common sense," the convergence of the faculties in recognition of the sole object, on the other hand, towards the unity of grounding, the "same" of the identical, determining the undetermined:[123] "To ground is to determine,"[124] thus "to ground is always to ground

[114] Cf. *ibidem*.

[115] Cf. *ibid*., p. 182; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

[116] Cf. *ibid*., p. 173; Eng. trans. cit., p. 132.

[117] Cf. *ibid*., p. 181; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

[118] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 177f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 135f.; cf. also *ibid*., p. 356; Eng. trans. cit., p. 278.

[119] Cf. *ibid*., p. 189; Eng. trans. cit., p. 145.

[120] *Ibid*., p. 184; Eng. trans. cit., p. 141; cf. also *ibid*., p. 186; Eng. trans. cit., p. 143.

[121] Cf. *ibid*., p. 190; Eng. trans. cit., p. 146.

[122] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 92, 261; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 67, 202; cf. also *ibid*., p. 352; Eng. trans. cit., p. 275.

[123] Cf. *ibid*., p. 352; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 274f.

[124] *Ibid*., p. 349; Eng. trans. cit., p. 272.

representation."[125] The thought of difference, on the other hand, consists in allowing determination to emerge, together with its dark background, to its "depth" or "groundlessness."[126] Idea is not "clear and distinct," but "distinction-obscurity,"[127] not the "sameness" in which to ground the determination of the particular, but the "obscure manifoldness" emerging together with the difference of the singular. The "animality" (*animalité*), the "stupidity" (*bêtise*) of thinking difference as identification and ungrounding opposes the reductive rationality of the orthodox philosophy of determination and grounding; the thought of simulacrum opposes the thought of form: "The fact is that to ground is to determine the indeterminate, but this is not a simple operation. When determination as such occurs, it does not simply provide a form or impart form to a given matter on the basis of the categories. Something of the ground rises to the surface, without assuming any form but, rather, insinuating itself between the forms; a formless base, an autonomous and faceless existence. This ground which is now on the surface is called depth or groundlessness. Conversely, when they are reflected in it, forms decompose, every model breaks down and all faces perish, leaving only the abstract line as the determination absolutely adequate to the indeterminate, just as the flash of lightning is equal to the night, acid equal to the base, and distinction adequate to obscurity as a whole: monstrosity (A determination which is not opposed to the indeterminate and does not limit it) (…). Thought understood as pure determination or abstract line must confront this indeterminate, this groundlessness. This indeterminate or groundlessness is also the animality peculiar to thought, the genitality of thought: not this or that animal form, but stupidity (*bêtise*)."[128]

As can be seen, in Deleuze,[129] the new thought becomes a radical alternative to rationalism. Paradox is contrasted with orthodox thought;[130] in contrast with common sense as a "syllogism," as co-operation by the faculties, we have the "disparate" (*dispars*), difference, thought as disparity, as radical "*diaphora*;"[131] in contrast with reason as form and "benevolence" of the true, we have anarchic formless thought as the repetition of "simulacra."[132] Thinking difference is not the rational connection of the manifold in a form, but "intoxication, the properly philosophical stupor or the Dionysian Idea."[133] Thus postmodernism searches for and finds models of "thinking" that are very distant from modern ones and alternative to them. As is

[125] *Ibid*., p. 351; Eng. trans. cit., p. 274.

[126] Cf. *ibid*., p. 352; Eng. trans. cit., p. 275.

[127] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 190f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 146.

[128] *Ibid*., pp. 352f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 275.

[129] This radical irrationalism is not to be found in other postmodern philosophers. They attempt a new conception of reason (See Michel Serres, for example). Nevertheless, irrationalism is a common characteristic of postmodern theories (not only in philosophy, but also in poetics, ethics, politics etc.), especially in those foregrounding the emancipatory character of postmodernism.

[130] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 250, 293; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 194, 227.

[131] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 193f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 148f.

[132] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 94f., 382ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 69, 299ff.

[133] *Ibid*., p. 276; Eng. trans. cit., p. 214.

well known, Deleuze pointed to schizophrenia with particular emphasis as "a possibility for thought."[134] "Stupidity" and "madness" are models of thought that substantially distances itself from common sense and the identity of representation, the foundation of reason and the benevolence of the true: "Turning over the ground is the most dangerous occupation, but also the most tempting in the stupefied moments of an obtuse will. For this ground, along with the individual, rises to the surface yet assumes neither form nor figure. It is there, staring at us, but without eyes (…). Stupidity is neither the ground nor the individual, but rather this relation in which individuation brings the ground to the surface without being able to give it form (…). All determinations become bad and cruel when they are grasped only by a thought which invents and contemplates them, flayed and separated from their living form, adrift upon this barren ground. Everything becomes violence on this passive ground. Everything becomes attack on this digestive ground. Here the Sabbath of stupidity and malevolence takes place. Perhaps this is the origin of that melancholy which weighs upon the most beautiful human faces: the presentiment of a hideousness peculiar to the human face, of a rising tide of stupidity, an evil deformity or a thought governed by madness. For from the point of view of a philosophy of nature, madness arises at the point at which the individual contemplates itself in this free ground (…) to the point that it can no longer stand itself."[135]

Deleuze clearly characterised the specificity of the new thought of difference in respect of representative thought on the basis of this general philosophical attitude, more profoundly than on the basis of rejection of the characteristics of representation. Or rather, he identified the origin of both ways of thinking in that difference in fundamental attitude. However, we have seen that Cohen's philosophy not only cannot be understood as logic of representation, but constitutes itself as a radical alternative to the latter. Secondly, I think it is clear enough not to require special discussion that the new thought of difference, presented as pure, i.e. with no presuppositions, is in fact not so, requiring "subjective" or "implicit" presuppositions, which determine it genetically: a well characterised basic feeling, like malevolence, misosophy, transgression, nomadism, anarchy, animality, madness, profoundly inspiring it in its whole procedure and results. Thirdly, it appears clear to me that for anyone who knows Cohen's philosophy, even superficially, that, despite the analogies that have emerged on specific themes, there is a radical diversity between it and the postmodern thought of difference presented by Deleuze: diversity in the basic "*sentiment*" behind the two perspectives. We can, however, look at Cohen's philosophy as a point of reference with its own place and role within the postmodern sphere, which give rise to a different line of thought from others, but which is not alien or anachronistic: specific, critical, perhaps even polemical, but not entirely outside the present cultural context. To lay the foundations of this possible development, it

[134] *Ibid*., p. 192; Eng. trans. cit., p. 148. This theme is widely dealt with in subsequent works by Deleuze and Guattari: cf., for example: G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'Anti-Œdipe*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1972; G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. Mille plateaux*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1980.

[135] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 197f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 152.

might be useful to go on with comparison with Deleuze's theories and at least mention some of the most important, obvious differences between the two philosophical conceptions.

First of all, I think one must highlight the radically different perspective on origin. This theme is just as important for Deleuze as it was for Cohen and we have found some interesting analogies. But at the root of these there is a basic difference, which mostly makes them apparent and in any case secondary. Cohen's principle of origin, which inspired not only his logic but also his whole philosophy, consists in the firm methodological conviction that all content originates from thought. Cohen's philosophy can be read on the whole as authenticating Platonism. Inasmuch as it developed the meaning of the Platonic Idea as hypothesis with rigorous method and fruitful results. Deleuze's thought of difference, on the other hand, presents itself as the overturning of Platonism (in Nietzsche's sense) also and especially because it posits difference as a non logical, non rational, nor rationalisable principle of thought. When commenting on the well known part of the *Republic* (523ff) to which Cohen had also devoted his attention, in a completely different direction,[136] Deleuze wrote: "concepts only ever designate possibilities. They lack the claws of absolute necessity – in other words, of an original violence inflicted upon thought; the claws of a strangeness or an enmity which alone would awaken thought from its natural stupor or eternal possibility: there is only involuntary thought, aroused but constrained within thought, and all the more absolutely necessary for being born, illegitimately, of fortuitousness in the world. Thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy, and nothing presupposes philosophy: everything begins with misosophy. Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think. The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself.

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter* (…). In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition."[137]

The principle of difference, referred to by Deleuze, is also called Idea or thought, but it is an energetic principle, whose stated model is in Nietzsche's "will to power." Reference to the concept of "energy" is interesting, because it does not so much mean (unlike for Cohen, as we shall see) reference to science and its laws but rather to the mythological conception of energy, which, disassociating itself from true scientific discourse, was widely used in non scientific fields, such as art and philosophy. Nietzsche can certainly be seen behind Deleuze in this, but also, and to no lesser extent, Bergson. Michel Serres rightly noted: "The crisis of philosophy. It had long intuited the precedence of power over reasons. The classics had written it in their language. Descartes and Leibniz in rational theology, Aristotle in metaphysics.

[136] Cf. H. COHEN, *Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik* , cit., p. 353.

[137] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 181f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

And here we have a physicist appearing to re-inscribe metatheory. He appeared to be showing a system of reference where everything happens under our eyes. Where the rational grows together with irreversible time. At the same time the possible decreases; at the same time power decreases. As if the rational were maximised when energy was at its maximum degradation. Either the fallen rational or rational decadence, this is precisely the criticism of Nietzsche and Bergson respectively."[138]

We find the same mythological meaning of "energy" in Deleuze: "When we seek to define the *energy* in general, either we take account of the extensive and qualified factors of extensity – in which case we are reduced to saying 'there is something which remains constant,' thereby formulating the great but flat tautology of the Identical – or, on the contrary, we consider pure intensity in so far as it is implicated in that deep region where no quality is developed, or any extensity deployed. In this case, we define energy in terms of the difference buried in this pure intensity and it is the formula 'difference of intensity' which bears the tautology, but this time the beautiful and profound tautology of the Different."[139]

Actually, it is precisely the themes highlighted above that suggest interesting analogies between Deleuze and Cohen: non-being as origin, intensity as a generating principle and Idea as a problem very clearly mark, at the same time, owing to their radically different meanings in the two philosophers, the difference between the two directions of thought.

The relative, productive non-being of being, *μὴ ὄν*, in Deleuze has an energetic, not a methodological positivity (as in Cohen).[140] Deleuze's intensity is not, like Cohen's, the generative law of reality, in accordance with continuity as the method of thought, but the principle that "makes difference an object of affirmation,"[141] the sensible principle of thought (albeit of transcendent sensibility).[142] Ideas are problems, not in the sense of Cohen's "hypothesis," but random imperatives, trials and selections arbitrarily deciding their own truth and which do not search for answers, but rather impose themselves as open questions, actually decisions, affirmations, productions of energy and power.[143] Even Idea as "task," behind an apparent analogy, hides a profound difference between Deleuze's and Cohen's perspectives, since in Deleuze the task is not possibility of realisation, but power of affirmation. Here too the above mentioned energetic model acts, not only for deliberate use of the notion of "potential" by Deleuze,[144] but especially for his precise choice of the notion of "virtual," in contrast with that of "possible." It is clear that Deleuze approaches the ancient metaphysical notion of "energy," conceived by Aristotle as an actualising force, rather than the thermo-dynamic scientific notion of the law of transformation. The virtual, unlike the possible, requires no realisation and thus, in

[138] M. SERRES, *Hermès IV. La distribution*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1977, p. 71.

[139] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 310; Eng. trans. cit., p. 240.

[140] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 342f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 266f.

[141] *Ibid*., p. 301; Eng. trans. cit., p. 234.

[142] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 187f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 144.

[143] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 210, 255ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 161f., 197ff.

[144] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 273f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 212.

Deleuze's view, cannot be grasped and removes Idea from the representative relationship with reality: it is complete affirmation and positivity which is actualised.[145]

The energetic conception of thought taken over by Deleuze from Nietzsche,[146] is not only different, but antithetic to Cohen's logical perspective: "It is true that Nietzsche was interested in the energetics of his time, but this was not the scientific nostalgia of a philosopher. We must discover what it was that he sought to find in the science of intensive quantities – namely, the means to realise what he called Pascal's prophecy: to make chaos an object of affirmation (…). A thought contrary to the laws of nature, repetition in the eternal return is the highest thought, the *gross Gedanke*."[147] Thought in this sense is not logos or law, but will to power, nomadism, "crowned anarchy," *hybris*.[148]

One can say that Deleuze's new thought of difference, and postmodernism represented by it is, in a way, realised Nietzscheism, the teaching of the will to power and eternal return brought about and fulfilled. Coherently with Nietzsche's presuppositions, this fulfilment has its epiphany in a midday without sun and light and in a superman, who, as Cohen wrote, coincides with a sub-man.[149] Emphasis on difference and individuality dissolves the subject to make room for the cruel affirmation of the different, positivity without laws, *hybris* of will as power. In Deleuze's words: "The great discovery of Nietzsche's philosophy, which marks his break with Schopenhauer and goes under the name of the will to power or the Dionysian world, is the following: no doubt the I and the Self must be replaced by an undifferentiated abyss, but this abyss is neither an impersonal nor an abstract Universal beyond individuation. On the contrary, it is the I and the self which are the abstract universals. They must be replaced, but in and by individuation, in the direction of the individuating factors which consume them and which constitute the fluid world of Dionysus. What cannot be replaced is individuation itself. Beyond the self and the I we find not the impersonal but the individual and its factors, individuation and its fields, individuality and its pre-individual singularities. For the pre-individual is still singular, just as the ante-self the ante-I are still individual – or, rather than simply 'still,' we should say 'finally.' That is why the individual in intensity finds its psychic image neither in the organisation of the self nor in the determination of species of the I, but rather in the fractured I and the dissolved self, and in the correlation of the fractured I with the dissolved self. This correlation seems clear, like that of the thinker and the thought, or that of the clear-confused thinker with distinct-obscure Ideas (the Dionysian thinker). It is Ideas which lead us from the fractured I to the dissolved Self (…), what swarms around the edges of the fracture are Ideas in the form of

[145] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 272ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 211ff.

[146] The interpretation of Nietzsche's thought given by Deleuze in his book, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1962, is an essential reference point for his subsequent works.

[147] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 313; Eng. trans. cit., p. 243.

[148] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 55f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 37f.

[149] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., p. 28.

problems – in other words, in the form of multiplicities made up of differential relations and variations of relations, distinctive points and transformations of points. These Ideas, however, are expressed in individuating factors, in the implicated world of intensive quantities which constitute the universal concrete individuality of the thinker or the system of the dissolved Self."[150]

The concept of "energy" also played an important role in Cohen, at different levels, in logic as in ethics, but he only referred to scientific consideration of this concept, to the law of the conservation of energy. Cohen interpreted the category of "substance" in the sense of "conservation" (*Erhaltung*) of energy, thus attributing a strongly dynamic meaning to it in the same direction as Kant's concept, but even more radically. Substance as "conservation" is in correlation with causality as "movement" (*Bewegung*) and "transformation" (*Verwandlung*): "transformation is, in a rigorous sense, *self-transformation. Causality only recognises conservation of substance in it. Energy, on the other hand, teaches the conservation of movement.* This is the *novelty*: that movement too, in the difference of its forms and despite this, is, nevertheless, in all of them *the same* movement. Thus what energy makes known is the conservation of movement."[151]

For Cohen the conservation of energy was also a model for the most fundamental logical level, for the very method of thinking: not, however, as an extralogical mythical principle, but as an exemplary law of the very movement of the logos. Thus the notion of "conservation," taken over from physics, was chosen by him, at the level of the method of thinking in general, of the logic of pure thought, not only to understand the correlation between "unity of knowledge" and multiplicity of the "modes" of judgement,[152] but, as we have seen, to explain the very movement of thought in general, "correlation," as "conservation" of "separation" and "unification:" "It certainly cannot be the opinion that an arbitrary *exchange between separation and unification* can take place; that thought jumps from one to the other type of activity and that the energy of thought comes out in the stimulus of this alternation (…). In the new science, in particular from *Descartes* onwards, an expression appears which recent times have taken over for the fundamental unitary principle of the mathematical science of nature: the term '*conservation*.' And 'conservation' could now also be the concept defining the correlation between the two directions of activity of judgement.

It is not an exchange that takes place, but conservation, at the same time, for separation and unification."[153]

Reference to the notion of "energy" was also deeply influential in Cohen's ethics, albeit in a rational perspective and on the scientific model of the law of conservation. Transposition onto the ethical level of the category of "energy" allowed Cohen to reach dynamic, not ontological understanding of the fundamental ethical

[150] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 332f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 258f.

[151] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., p. 292; cf. *ibid*., pp. 288–299.

[152] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 70–72.

[153] *Ibid*., pp. 61f.

categories of "subject," "action," "will" and "freedom." Freedom, wrote Cohen, "must mean nothing else than the *conservation of the subject in the conservation of its actions. Freedom is the energy of will.* And all the forms of the energy of will are self-transformations of the moral subject."[154] It certainly would be a fictitious, overstretched actualisation to speak of deconstruction of the subject in Cohen, but it is entirely legitimate to speak of desubstantialisation and deontologisation of the subject, which is resolved in dynamic correlation, whose unity is presupposed, but only as an infinite ethical task: "the moral person cannot be considered given – wrote Cohen in *Ethik des reinen Willens* –, defined in accordance with certain natural dispositions and conditions (…). The subject is not the soul, which for ethics immediately becomes a ghost; the subject is not something which is simply born, is inherited (…). What sense would ethics have if the subject were understood as already given, born and brought up in its environment?"[155] Even in the intense discussion by Cohen, in *Ethik des reinen Willens*,[156] of the affective and impulsive aspect of will, in constant comparison with the psychophysiology of his times, he was not aiming at the negation of this dimension of will or its intellectualistic reduction to thought, but rather at the setting up correlation between thought and affectivity, thought and emotional impulse,[157] on the basis of an analogy, however imperfect, between "affectivity" and "movement"[158] and between "task" and "substance" (understood in the above sense of "conservation of energy").[159] Affectivity is not reduced to thought; it keeps its energetic meaning, but, for this very reason, is placed in correlation with thought and genetically understood, by means of the method of continuity and the conception of intensity, starting from its pure origin.

In Cohen's perspective there certainly was no destruction of the subject in Nietzsche's sense, but neither was there dogmatic reaffirmation of a static, unchanging subject, the bearer of authoritarian, totalitarian reason. Cohen's ethical subject was an infinite task, freely and dynamically in constant self-transformation and realisation. It was not the anti-human superman, but rather rediscovered its human dignity in the condition of *subjectum*, which is also social and political: the "poor man" is the realisation of the human subject, he is the "righteous man," who is entrusted with the sense of historical and political action: "suffering reveals itself to be the essence, as it were, of man (…). If you wish to know what man is, then get to know his suffering. This is no longer a metaphysics of pessimism; rather, on the basis of social insight the poverty of man is personified."[160]

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[154] *Ibid*., p. 302; cf. *ibid*., pp. 299–302.

[155] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., pp. 95f.

[156] Cf. *ibid*., chapters 2 and 3.

[157] Cf. *ibid*., p. 167.

[158] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 132f.

[159] Cf. *ibid*., p. 176.

[160] H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, hg. von Benzion Kellermann, Fock, Leipzig 1919; hg. von Bruno Strauss, J. Kaufmann, Frankfurt a.M. 1929; repr. J. Melzer, Köln 1959, p. 170; Eng. trans. S. Kaplan, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., New York 1972, pp. 146f. Several developments in contemporary Latin American philosophy are particularly

Clearly, two such radically different perspectives, like those of Cohen and Deleuze, can do nothing but lead in radically different directions, but what needs pointing out here once again is, above all, that both ways of thinking are entirely alien to "metaphysical" thought as representation: in this sense Deleuze's "thought of difference" and Cohen's "thought of purity" are actually two possibilities for postmodern philosophy.

The line of thought I am analysing in Deleuze, as an exemplary model, but where many others are to be found and which well reflects important aspects of contemporary culture, could certainly not have come to the fore if it had not been backed up the complex, radical critique of modernity characterising European culture from the end of the nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries. Many philosophers, on the basis of different presuppositions and modalities, have taken part in a single, large scale, radical critique of abstract, totalitarian, instrumental reason, in the name of a "new thought," that is closer to life and itself an expression of concrete life (understood under very different headings: existential, biological, psychic, historical-political etc.). At the same time, a route was being searched for leading to thought, which, freed of bad rationality, could reach the point of thinking the unthought-of, or even the unthinkable. This radical philosophical critique was part of a more widespread cultural movement also including the deconstruction and dissolution of form, in the artistic sphere, the discussion and weakening of grounds, in the scientific sphere, and the critique and destruction of bourgeois models, in the moral, political economic and religious spheres. This cultural movement, which was so widespread and complex as to make up a common atmosphere for quite different theories, is what I would call "Antimodernism," since, despite its critical character aiming at the dissolution of the structures it identified with "Modernity," or rather precisely owing to this critical, and on occasion dialectic, character, it was still in every way a stage in Modernity itself. If one considers postmodernism the heir of the antimodernism, this cannot be understood in the sense of continuity: postmodernism, which we see here exemplified in Deleuze's thought, is actually something quite different, firstly because it explicitly rejects the critical character typical of antimodernism which kept the latter in the sphere of modernity. Postmodernism can be considered the heir of antimodernism only in the sense that it came to the fore on the basis of the results of the latter, in the cultural void left by the destructive action

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interesting in this context, especially the Enrique Dussel's "philosophy of liberation." Dussel placed poor, oppressed man at the centre of his thought, explicitly speaking of "transmodern" thought, which is different from the "postmodern" European and North American variety (cf. E. DUSSEL, *Filosofía de la Liberación*, Usta, Bogotá 1980[2]; IDEM, *Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid 1998; IDEM, *Posmodernidad y transmodernidad. Diálogos con la filosofia de Gianni Vattimo*, Universidad Iberoamericana Plantel Golfo Centro, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, Universidad Iberoamericana Plantel Laguna, Puebla 1999). Andrès Ancona Quiroz, in a paper: "Die Religionsphilosophie Hermann Cohens in ihrer Bedeutung für die Theologie und Philosophie der Befreiung in Lateinamerika" (as yet unpublished), read at the Congress on "Gott in der Philosophie aus den Quellen des Judentums" (Zurich, 7th and 8th November 2002), attempted an interesting reading of Cohen, starting out from the "a priori" of poverty.

(actually, significant, necessary and inevitable) completed by it: the specificity of postmodernism, at least in the form considered here, is the enthusiastic, Dionysian conviction of being able to settle in that place, void of all form, left by the destruction of the modern, so as to give birth to a culture that, perhaps for the first time in history, is not built up on new forms, grounds and models, but is total emancipation from all form and ground.

Reference to Cohen in postmodern culture is possible in a different framework. It is a question of rediscovering the tradition of modernity that Cohen himself and his school identified with the name "critical rationalism" or "critical idealism." This tradition is an authentic expression of modernity, actually the most authentic one, from this point of view, and, from within modernity, constantly carried out its intransigent critique against totalitarian or instrumental reason, against dogmatism of possessed, static forms, against established moral, political and religious models, in the name of critical, dynamic reason, openly constituted as an infinite task aware of the need to move thought beyond the limits of concept as far as thinking on the limit of Idea, though careful never to go beyond this limit. In line with this modern tradition, which also played an important role in the critical work of antimodernism (one immediately thinks of important aspects of the Frankfurt School, but more recent research has also foregrounded this dimension in thinkers like Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin, and the thought of Hermann Cohen himself can be seen in this perspective, under several headings), thus with reference to Cohen, who deliberately represented and revitalised it, different postmodern thought can be developed, since it is just as aware of the irreversible result of antimodern critique, at the same time being convinced of being able to think the new culture in continuity with rationalism and modern critical idealism, which survives because it was not the target of correct, inevitable antimodern iconoclasm.[161]

Before concluding, it still seems worthwhile outlining the divergent lines of these two perspectives in postmodernism: on the one hand, Dionysian irrationalism, for which I shall make further reference to Deleuze's model, and, on the other, critical rationalism going back to Cohen, thought there is a need to go further in adequate development for the new cultural situation.

In Deleuze's view, the new thought of difference must take an opposite direction to traditional philosophy: if the latter, as has been seen above, is orthodoxy, good and common sense, the new thought is paradox, violence and para-sense: "Philosophy is revealed not by good sense but by paradox. Paradox is the pathos or the passion of philosophy. There are several kinds of paradox, all of which are opposed to the complementary forms of orthodoxy – namely, good sense and common sense. Subjectively, paradox breaks up the common exercise of the faculties and places each before its own limit, before its incomparable: thought before the

[161] The picture I have only too briefly outlined here (and which I hope to enlarge elsewhere on on another occasion) clearly converges with the arguments of J. HABERMAS, *Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt*, in IDEM, *Kleine politische Schriften (I-IV)*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 1981, pp. 444–464, although developing along different routes and themes, thus leading to conclusions that are not identical in respect of the perspectives of postmodernism.

unthinkable which it alone is nevertheless capable of thinking; memory before the forgotten which is also its immemorial; sensibility before the imperceptible which is indistinguishable from its intensive. At the same time, however, paradox communicates to the broken faculties that relation which is far from good sense, aligning them along a volcanic line which allows one to ignite the other, leaping from one limit to the next. Objectively, paradox displays the element which cannot be totalised within a common element, along with the difference which cannot be equalised or cancelled at the direction of a good sense."[162]

If common sense is the convergence and co-operation of the faculties in recognition of the object (*συλλογισμός*),[163] paradox, which is "the opposite of good sense,"[164] pushes each faculty out of the "hinges" of good sense, in a discordant, transcendent, divergent exercise, in which there is no further communication between the faculties, except for the "discordant agreement," installed by violence which makes them diverge:[165] "Rather than all the faculties converging and contributing to a common project of recognising an object, we see divergent projects in which, with regard to what concerns it essentially, each faculty is in the presence of that which is its 'own.' Discord of the faculties, chain of force and fuse along which each confronts its limit, receiving from (or communicating to) the other only a violence which brings it face to face with its own element, as though with its disappearance or its perfection (*comme de son disparate ou de son incomparable*)."[166]

It is only this discordant, transcendent exercise of the faculties that allows the "sublime,"[167] to be reached, i.e. the "limit-object" of each faculty: the insensible which can only be felt and which makes all that is sensible possible,[168] the unthinkable which can only be thought and which makes all that is thinkable possible,[169] and analogously, the unmemorable for the unimaginable[170] and for these other new faculties can emerge as a consequence of emancipation from the limits of common sense.[171]

That which "awakes"[172] and moves this paradoxical activity of the faculties is Idea, as difference, intensity and energy. Ideas, as we have already seen, are not concepts of thought, but energetic intensities and violent powers, more sensible (to transcendent sensibility) than "ideal" (in the sense of the abstract universal). It is they that, at the same time, move each faculty in the direction of its transcendent

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[162] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 293; Eng. trans. cit., p. 227.

[163] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 184, 193; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 141, 148.

[164] *Ibid*., p. 250; Eng. trans. cit., p. 194.

[165] Cf. *ibid*., p.190; Eng. trans. cit., p. 146; cf. also *ibid*., p. 250; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 193f.

[166] *Ibid*., p. 184; Eng. trans. cit., p. 141.

[167] Cf. *ibid*., p. 190; Eng. trans. cit., p. 146. Explicit reference is made to Kant's notion, though developments are radically different from it.

[168] Cf. *ibid*., p. 305; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 236f.

[169] Cf. *ibid*., p. 249; Eng. trans. cit., p. 192.

[170] Cf. *ibid*., p. 188; Eng. trans. cit., p. 144.

[171] Cf. *ibid*., p. 187; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 143f.

[172] Cf. *ibid*., p. 213; Eng. trans. cit., p. 164.

exercise, constituting the transcendent object for each of them, and connect the faculties by means of the violence of discord they impose. Ideas, multiple and irreducible, obscure and distinct differences and intensities, constitute "para-sense," the opposite of common and good sense, which makes the paradoxical exercise of the faculties possible and to which the latter always refers back: "there are Ideas which traverse all the faculties, but are the object of none in particular. Perhaps in effect (…) it will be necessary to reserve the name of Ideas not for pure *cogitanda* but rather for those instances which go from sensibility to thought and from thought to sensibility, capable of engendering in each case, according to their own order, the limit- or transcendent-object of each faculty. Ideas are problems, but problems only furnish the conditions under which the faculties attain their superior exercise. Considered in this light, Ideas, far from having as their milieu a good sense or a common sense, refer to a para-sense which determines only the communication between disjointed faculties. Neither are they illuminated by a natural light: rather, they shine like differential flashes which leap and metamorphose (…). The restitution of the Idea in the doctrine of the faculties requires the explosion of the clear and distinct, and the discovery of a Dionysian value according to which *the Idea is necessarily obscure in so far as it is distinct*, all the more obscure the more it is distinct. Distinction-obscurity becomes here the true tone of philosophy, the symphony of the discordant Idea."[173]

It now seems clear to me that Deleuze's thought of difference does not only represent a confutation of rationalism, understood in the restricted meaning identifying it with representative thought, but is programmatically constituted as irrationalist thought, understood as energy and will to power. What I should like to further show is that this thought has an ecstatic, apophatic, and, in the end, mystical outcome, significantly reflecting a possibility in postmodern culture. Deleuze's new thought, as we have seen, opposes rationalism understood as thought by concepts and representations. The concrete, empirical dynamism[174] of Idea opposes the abstraction of the concept, the "dramas of Ideas" the "schemata of concepts."[175] Ideas are originative forces and intensities, which must be contemplated ecstatically by thought, "learning," not concepts, that reason can "know:" "the Idea and 'learning' express (…) the presentation of the unconscious, not the representation of consciousness."[176] This is why the new thought is a radical alternative to Hegel's rational dialectics, which claims to understand and represent "abstract and dead essences" in the concept, opposing it with extrarational, irrational thought, capable of giving free expression to Idea as "inessential."[177] The "Theatrum Philosophicum"[178] must not be understood as the representation of concepts, but as a drama of Ideas: "The theatre of repetition is opposed to the theatre of representation, just as movement is opposed

[173] *Ibid*., pp. 190f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 146.

[174] Cf. *ibid*., p. 3; Eng. trans. cit., p. xx.

[175] Cf. *ibid*., p. 281; Eng. trans. cit., p. 218.

[176] *Ibid*., p. 248; Eng. trans. cit., p. 192.

[177] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 242f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 187f.

[178] Cf. M. FOUCAULT, *op. cit.*

to the concept and to representation which refers it back to the concept. In the theatre of repetition, we experience pure forces, dynamic lines in space which act without intermediary upon the spirit, and link it directly with nature and history, with a language which speaks before words, with gestures which develop before organised bodies, with masks before faces, with spectres and phantoms before characters – the whole apparatus of repetition as a 'terrible power.'"[179]

This reference to the energetic, violent character of Ideas, to the "cruelty" of the new thought connotes it, however, beyond its opposition to representative thought, as irrationalism in the widest, most radical sense. I have already pointed out[180] how, rather than the critique of representation, it was the rejection of the principle of "good will" and "philosophy" and opposition to it of "bad will" and "misosophy" are the real barrier between Deleuze's thought of difference and Cohen's thought of purity. Now it must be highlighted that this barrier radically qualifies the latter as rationalism and the former as irrationalism. For the characteristics so far discussed, the thought of difference opposes the very existence of reason as "form" and "law" and constitutively takes on a transgressive, anti-nomistic character, both in the theoretical and moral spheres,[181] which goes well beyond the critique of established order and is set up as programmed negation of every order, every "form," and thus every "*ratio*." We are dealing, then, with radical, aware and aggressive irrationalism. In the words of Deleuze: "we believe that when these problems attain their proper degree of *positivity*, and when difference becomes the object of a corresponding *affirmation*, they release a power of aggression and selection which destroys the beautiful soul by depriving it of its very identity and breaking its good will. The problematic and the differential determine struggles or destructions in relation to which those of the negative are only appearances, and the wishes of the beautiful soul are so many mystifications trapped in appearances. The simulacrum is not just a copy, but that which overturns all copies by *also* overturning the models: every thought becomes an aggression."[182]

It will be no surprise then to note the apophatic, mystical outcome of this new thought of difference, since history shows that this is the possible, if not inevitable, outcome, not of all irrational thought, but of all programmatically irrationalist thought, when it is adequately developed in its implications and consequences.

The attempt to think the unthinkable which can only be thought and feel the insensible which can only be felt, i.e. difference in its originative univocity and incomparability, does not only reject the expression of this thought in representation and the concept, but considers any expression of difference inadequate. What is more, it considers all formalisation of it unfaithful. The intensive, which Cohen considered a law, generating and founding the reality of the extensive, for Deleuze, is an implicit individuality, which any explanation necessarily betrays and neutralises. Idea, which for Cohen was hypothesis and form, the principle of the origin of

[179] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 19; Eng. trans. cit., p. 10.

[180] Cf. *supra*, pp. 20ff.

[181] Cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 8f., 12; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 2f., 5.

[182] *Ibid*., pp. 2f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. XX.

any objective reality, for Deleuze is obscurely distinct, pure formless energy, which inevitably loses itself in any formalisation and rationalisation. Thus thought of difference, in the face of the inevitable problem of thinking the unthinkable in some way (though not by means of representation), takes the apophatic route whose method is paradox. There is an "inexplicable," difference, which, nevertheless, is explicated and when this happens, is not explicated: "It is not surprising that, strictly speaking, difference should be 'inexplicable.' Difference is explicated, but in systems in which it tends to be cancelled; this means only that difference is essentially implicated, that its being is implication. For difference, to be explicated is to be cancelled or to dispel the inequality which constitutes it. The formula according to which 'to explicate is to identify' is a tautology. We cannot conclude from this that difference is cancelled out, or at least that it is cancelled in itself. It is cancelled in so far as it is drawn outside itself, *in* extensity and *in* the quality which fills that extensity. However, difference creates both this extensity and this quality (…). Difference of intensity is cancelled or tends to be cancelled in this system, but it creates this system by explicating itself. Whence the double aspect of the quality as a sign: it refers to an implicated order of constitutive differences, and tends to cancel out those differences in the extended order in which they are explicated (…). Difference in the form of intensity remains implicated in itself, while it is cancelled by being explicated in extensity."[183]

Reading passages like this one (and there are many other similar ones) analogies immediately spring to mind with many teachings in the mystical tradition or with that of Nicholas of Cusa on "*complicatio*" and "*explicatio*" of God, though such references are not explicit in Deleuze, or, further, with Bruno's "*complicatio*"[184] and ground and the inversion of powers in Schelling, to whom Deleuze does make explicit reference.[185] Therefore, apophatic thought of difference is inevitably paradoxical, since it consists in explicating the inexplicable implicated, while maintaining awareness of its inexplicability, at the same time, however, thinking it in its mystifying explication: "We must therefore distinguish two orders of implication or degradation: a secondary implication which designates the state in which intensities are enveloped by the qualities and extensity which explicate them; and a primary implication designating the state in which intensity is implicated in itself, at once both enveloping and enveloped (…). Only transcendental enquiry can discover that intensity remains implicated in itself and continues to envelop difference at the very moment when it is reflected in the extensity and the quality that it creates, which implicate it only secondarily, just enough to 'explicate it.' Extensity, quality, limitation, opposition indeed designate realities, but the form which difference assumes here is illusory. Difference pursues its subterranean life while its image reflected by the surface is scattered. Moreover, it is in the nature of that image, but only that

[183] *Ibid*., pp. 293f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 228. See also the following pages in the same text.

[184] Reference can be found *ibid*., p. 161; Eng. trans. cit., p. 123.

[185] Cf. *ibid*., p. 296; Eng. trans. cit., p. 230.

image, to be scattered, just as it is in the nature of the surface to cancel difference, but only on the surface."[186]

Paradox is, therefore, not only a rhetorical figure, but the structure of this apophatic thought, which cannot think inexplicable difference, except as the para-sense to which it refers back, only negatively, systematic understanding of the explicit meanings alien and opposed to their common sense, i.e. paradoxical. Hence the meaning and importance of the "simulacrum" for this thought.

It is the opposite of copy, just as thought as "repetition" is alternative to thought as representation: "The mask, the costume, the covered – wrote Deleuze – is everywhere the truth of the uncovered. The mask is the true subject of repetition. Because repetition differs in kind from representation, the repeated cannot be represented: rather, it must always be signified, masked by what signifies it, itself masking what it signifies."[187]

But the simulacrum is not only alternative signification to representation, it refers back, more radically, to nothing, the *'en-sof* of difference, since the sense to which it refers back, masking it, is formless, anarchic, nomadic chaos, the bottomless depth of different Ideas,[188] and its significant modality does not consist in masked expression, in simulation and variation of an original, but in infinite variation on no theme (a trait recalling more the rococo than the baroque),[189] parody which leaves no place for the original.[190] Here is Deleuze's definition: "by simulacrum we should not understand a simple imitation but rather the act by which the very idea of a model or privileged position is challenged and overturned. The simulacrum is the instance which includes a difference within itself, such as (at least) two divergent series on which it plays, all resemblance abolished so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy."[191]

The mystical character of the thought of difference is, actually, somewhat aware and explicit, if Deleuze himself, with reference to the empiricism of Ideas, can write: "Empiricism is by no means a reaction against concepts, nor a simple appeal to lived experience. On the contrary, it undertakes the most insane creation of concepts ever seen or heard. Empiricism is a mysticism and a mathematicism of concepts."[192]

The positive absolute of difference stands as the pleroma implying and making possible all the divergent series of its manifestations, but which, at the same time, cannot be referred back to, as their point of convergence, since it is a formless, chaotic horizon, continually shifted and "ungrounded."[193] Ideas, as has been seen above,

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[186] *Ibid*., pp. 309f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 240; cf. *ibid*., pp. 305, 316; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 237, 245f.

[187] *Ibid*., p. 29; Eng. trans. cit., p. 18.

[188] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 355f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 277f.

[189] Infinite variation with no theme is a common subject in many postmodern writers and deserves further consideration.

[190] Cf. *ibid*., p. 92; Eng. trans. cit., p. 67.

[191] *Ibid*., p. 95; Eng. trans. cit., p. 69.

[192] *Ibid*., p. 3; Eng. trans. cit., p. XX.

[193] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 161f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 123f.

are the "distinct-obscure," and this is "intoxication, the properly philosophical stupor or the Dionysian Idea."[194] Thought is the "universal *undergrounding*" of the "fractured I" and "dissolved Cogito."[195] The thought of difference, then, stands as an apophatic route, entirely transcendent in respect of form, law and reason, towards the ecstatic, and mystical vision of the absolutely positive being of difference: "if the eternal return – wrote Deleuze – reduces qualities to the status of pure signs, and retains of extensities only what combines with the original depth, even at the cost of our coherence and in favour of a superior coherence, then the most beautiful qualities will appear, the most brilliant colours, the most precious stones and the most vibrant extensions. For once reduced to their seminal reasons, and having broken all relation with the negative, these will remain forever affixed in the intensive space of positive differences. Then, in turn, the final prediction of the *Phaedo* will be realised, in which Plato promised to the sensibility disconnected from its empirical exercise temples, stars and gods such as had never before been seen, unheard-of affirmations. The prediction is realised, it is true, only by the very overturning of Platonism."[196]

If we now want to think the direction of thought developing in and for postmodern culture in the light of inspiration from Cohen, we must immediately acknowledge that, however original this thought might be in respect of its source of inspiration, it cannot abandon an intrinsic, unavoidable character of Cohen's philosophy, i.e. its methodologically rational and programmatically rationalist character. Whether such a direction of thought can adequately place itself in the context of postmodern culture and whether it can produce a form of understanding and interpretation, as well as relevant propositions concerning it, is the fundamental question to which an initial answer is attempted in this essay. If a positive response emerges the conviction is implicit that such a response, in contrast with Deleuze's and those of many others, will be found in the sphere of the option for rational thought and a rationalist programme. It is now a question of seeing, in conclusion, on what fundamental "*présupposés*" and "*sentiments*"[197] this thought, which is the aware, intentional heir of Cohen's philosophy, should be carried out.

We have seen above[198] that Deleuze's new thought of difference is constituted starting off from the rejection of representative reason, and we have also seen that Cohen's thought of purity is certainly of the rationalist type, though in no way agreeing with the conception of reason as a faculty of representation.[199] Nevertheless, at a much more interesting, deeper level, Deleuze's rejection of "reason" is rejection of its very "presuppositions:" "good will," "common sense," "orthodoxy."[200] these presuppositions, even more radically than representative procedure, in Deleuze's

[194] *Ibid*., p. 276; Eng. trans. cit., p. 214.

[195] Cf. *ibid*., p. 251; Eng. trans. cit., p. 194.

[196] *Ibid*., p. 314; Eng. trans. cit., p. 244.

[197] I am deliberately using this terminology, here and in the following pages, in the meaning given it by Deleuze: cf. *supra*, pp. 20ff.

[198] Cf. *supra*, pp. 5ff.

[199] Cf. *supra*, pp. 13ff.

[200] Cf. *supra*, pp. 20ff.

view, must be rejected in rational thought and in the philosophy of the father of this thought, Plato, so that a new thought, the result of Nietzschean "overturning" of Platonism, must necessarily have an irrationalist, and, in the end, mystical outcome.[201] Cohen's philosophy now requires evaluation at the level of these presuppositions. Starting from different understanding of Plato, it was inspired by the later to develop as rationalist thought.

In my view, the departure point of this examination is a clear lack of uniformity between Cohen's conception of "rational thought" in respect of Deleuze's paradigm and this is not restricted to the already discussed conception of non representative reason, but concerns the presuppositions themselves. This lack of uniformity allows Cohen's rationalism to escape from postmodern condemnation and posit itself as an alternative route in contemporary culture.

As has been said, Deleuze identifies and rejects, as inseparable presuppositions of classical "reason," "good will," "common sense" and "orthodoxy." What I aim to show here is that these presuppositions are not at all inseparable and that, on the contrary, Cohen's philosophy, as the heir and exponent of *critical* rationalism, precisely *in the name of the critical approach*, as the essential, determining dimension of reason, *is fundamentally based on the presupposition of "good will"* and, at the same time, *does not at all partake of the presuppositions of "common sense" and "orthodoxy:"* it is, in short, a *non orthodox philosophy*.[202]

If "good will" is the disposition of thought towards the true and the good,[203] "orthodoxy" or "common sense" is thought as co-ordination and harmonisation of the faculties.[204] The inseparability, rather the coincidence of these two presuppositions implies the will to truth of philosophy is realised so as to "appropriate the ideal of an 'orthodoxy,'"[205] i.e. in "syllogism" as harmonious co-operation of the faculties[206] and as the position of illusory problems, inasmuch as the solution is guaranteed by the choice of premises between the "*places*" of "common sense."[207]

For Cohen, on the other hand, in accordance with the authentic meaning of Platonic dialectics,[208] thought as Idea or hypothesis is rendering reason, not of the conclusions of the syllogism, starting from presupposedly true premises, but of the premises themselves, which are thus producers of knowledge, precisely inasmuch as they are "forms" that have not been definitively acquired, but that are still subjected to further critical analysis. Thought, in Plato's and Cohen's sense, of the

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[201] Cf. *supra*, pp. 32ff.

[202] Cf. the meaning given by Deleuze to: *φιλία*, *philosophy*, *misosophy*: cf. *supra*, p. 21.

[203] Cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 171 and 172; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 131 and 132.

[204] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 174ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 133ff.

[205] Cf. *ibid*., p. 193; Eng. trans. cit., p. 148.

[206] Cf. *ibidem*.

[207] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 207f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 159f.

[208] Cf. PLATO, *The Republic*, 510b-511e. On Cohen's interpretation of the Platonic distinction between *διάνοια* and *νόησις*, cf. H. COHEN, *Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik*, cit., and A. POMA, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, cit., p. 32.

dialectics of Ideas cannot be reduced to the banal "question-answer" scheme, but moves in the inexhaustible riches of the "foundation-infinite task" correlation. The "good will" of philosophy, the disposition of thought to truth, does not at all consist in seeking protection from a truth or, more generally, a common "form" that is dogmatically accepted, but, on the contrary, exposing itself to the search (*Suchen*), as I will say later, to the "*Sehnsucht* for search," for truth and "form" never before possessed. In a well-known passage in his *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Cohen, commenting on Lessing's famous parable in the sense of "truth as method," wrote: "In Lessing's parable, the father was holding truth in one hand and in the other the aspiration to truth (*das Suchen nach Wahrheit*). We do not only give up the gift of one hand but do not even recognise the difference between the two hands. What could mean truth for the father does not enter the sphere of our problems. And we do not even allow the value of aspiration to truth to be denied by the doubt (*Skepsis*) that truth be in the other hand. The search for truth, this alone is truth (*das Suchen der Wahrheit, das allein ist Wahrheit*)."[209]

Syllogism, as a method of thought, takes on, then, an entirely different meaning from the one described above, though retaining a rigorously rational meaning, actually making this meaning much richer and pregnant with meaning, precisely inasmuch as it does not present rational procedure as obvious orthodoxy, technical inference within the presupposed limits of common sense, but as *critical* thought and, as such, thought *on* the limit.

In Cohen's wide ranging, detailed reflection on syllogism in *Kants Begründung der Ethik*[210] and *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*,[211] some especially important elements for the present context, which also characterise Cohen's conception of reason, emerge. First of all, syllogism is "reason," i.e. "logos:" "*συλλογισμός* comes from *λόγος*,"[212] secondly, the main premise, in which the whole syllogism is grounded, is Idea, i.e. "hypothesis" and with it "task:" it posits the "problem" inasmuch as it is an infinite "task." When commenting on a rather well known passage in Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*,[213] Cohen understood its deep meaning and took it over as an essential part of thought as Idea and hypothesis: "That in the major a miserable tautology was expressed, meaning nothing more that what is stated, cannot have been hidden from anyone. But that that 'all' is a 'petition' guiding and generating the whole rational procedure of the syllogism, that in the main premise speaks a principle (*Prinzip*), this is where the strength of the syllogism lies, its incorruptible meaning in the apparatus of knowing and the history of thought. The petition

[209] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., p. 68.

[210] Cf. H. COHEN, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, Dümmler, Berlin 1877; Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1910^2, part 1, chap. 3.

[211] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., especially pp. 553–584.

[212] *Ibid*., p. 533.

[213] Cf. I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2. Auflage 1787, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 3, pp. 379f.; Eng. trans. N. Kemp Smith, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2003^3, pp. 315ff.

contained in the main premise *is the principle*; for this and in this syllogistics is free of a *petitio principii*.

The principle of syllogism is the *Idea of the unconditioned.* We can put it like this: if the conditioned is given, then the *complete series* of conditions, the *unconditioned*, represented as an *object*, must be understood as a *task* (*Aufgabe*)."[214]

This meaning of the "unconditioned," i.e. of "Idea," as an infinite task, which Cohen took over from Kant,[215] is a fundamental structure of pure thought, just as much as the thought of origin. If pure thought can not refer back to a ground, but has its origin in itself as infinite foundation, on the other hand, it is never concluded in a solution, but is always open in an infinite task. Actually, origin itself is not "given," but rather a "*petition*," a "task."[216] The very movement of thought, correlation as the conservation of separation and unification, must be thought as an infinite task;[217] and the resulting concept of object, is not simply a solution of the problem, but always, at the same time, re-proposition of the task. Concept, wrote Cohen, is "*The unity of answer and question*, of solution and task;"[218] concepts "persist in this *fluctuating* between solution and task;"[219] "concept cannot be concluded in a solution; any true solution is the womb of new tasks."[220]

Action as task is certainly a central theme of ethics (and this is also the case in Cohen's ethics), but it is also something more than this; it is a central, but not specific theme of ethics: it is nearer the truth to say that, through the theme of action as task, the primacy of ethics in the system emerges, the ethical "presupposition" of the whole system, including logic. Cohen wrote in *Ethik des reinen Willens*: "In *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* we tried to supply the characteristic of judgement following the constitutive line of the concept of action. Here also it was the *Task* that this characteristic had its ground and confirmation in.

Concept is not given to thought; it is judgement that must create it. Reaching this conviction is already a great deal, but all has not been achieved with this. And this conviction is not assured unless another is added and unless the other one becomes vital and, only in this way, makes the initial conviction vital. Concept, in other words, is not only not given in advance and must be produced, but is not even given at the end of production; *there is no end and no conclusion for it*. Its end would be its annihilation. Its existing only consists in its being produced, and its being produced does not allow an end, if the concept is authentic. This means: concept is task.

This task of the concept constitutes the content of thought, the object of judgement. Thought, judgement are therefore action."[221]

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[214] H. COHEN, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, cit., p. 79. Cf. IDEM, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, cit., pp. 665f.; IDEM, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., p. 593.

[215] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 532.

[216] Cf. *ibid*., p. 570.

[217] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 64f.

[218] *Ibid*., p. 381.

[219] *Ibid*., p. 382.

[220] *Ibid*., p. 385.

[221] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., pp. 170f.

Therefore, if ethics has a specificity in respect of logic, this does not consist in the centrality of the theme of task in general, but in other aspects, for which this theme takes on specific meanings and directions in ethics. I shall mention only two of them, which appear to me to be the most important for the argument I intend to develop.

Firstly, it is only in the ethical sphere of reason as pure will that the dimension of "affectivity" is added to that of "thought." Here I cannot dwell on the elaboration of the affective component of will, developed in detail by Cohen, also in direct comparison with contemporary psychology and psychophysiology.[222] I shall restrict myself to highlighting how the affective dimension of will was entirely understood by Cohen through the meaning of task, which is not even absent in the dimension of will as thought: "*As the content of affectivity task remains the only, perfect content.* Task fulfils itself, but, at the same time, certainly does not exhaust its fulfilment. This depends on other circumstances, thought, first of all (…). *Task makes affectivity reflective and immanent*, but, at the same time, also, as the type and direction of consciousness, sovereign and *pure*."[223]

Secondly, if in logic it is the concept of the object that presents itself as the infinite task of thought, in ethics the subject itself is the true task of will, understood as both thought and affectivity. In Cohen's philosophy, reason is not presented in a dogmatic, orthodox and totalitarian meaning, but in a critical, authentically dialectical and infinitely open one, because, neither the concept of the object nor the subject itself are presuppositions but an infinite task. The subject of reason mentioned by Cohen is obviously not the empirical, psychological or psychoanalytical subject (though also being the foundation of these) but the transcendental one. I think postmodern deconstruction or annihilation would be something of a problem, or even out of place, for this subject, since there would be nothing to deconstruct, the subject being the target of a construction process that had never been carried out, an infinite task. Ethics is the sphere of the infinite production of the subject by reason as pure will.

Let us examine this point in two stages: the different functions of "action" in logic and ethics and ethical understanding of "self-consciousness," i.e. of the subject, as a task. Logical thought, as has been said, is action inasmuch as it is infinite task of production of the concept of the object, while, for pure will, action is the only purpose and the object is *rather* necessary mediation for producing action: "In thought the object is the purpose, the content. And action is the means for producing this object. In will, on the other hand, action is the content and purpose. And the object is nothing more than the means for producing action, to bring it into being."[224]

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[222] This is being investigated by H. WIEDEBACH, *Physiology of the Pure Will: Concepts of Moral Energy in Hermann Cohen's Ethics*, in *Hermann Cohen Ethics*, ed. by R. Gibbs, in "The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy," 13 (2006), n. 1–3; repr. Brill, Leiden-Boston 2006, pp. 85–103.

[223] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., p. 144; cf. *ibid*., pp. 143f.

[224] *Ibid*., p. 175.

Consequently the Self, "self-consciousness," the subject of will, is not the presupposition of action, but the unachieved result of it as an infinite task: "From the beginning – wrote Cohen –, we have used the concept of *task*, differentiating it from that of object. But if self-consciousness, in the ultimate, supreme sense, is only a task, this had never been stated explicitly. Nevertheless, this precise conception is decisive. If we now see that the problem of self-consciousness does not concern consciousness in the psychological sense, but only in the methodological one, then we will also be able to say that self-consciousness means *self-will*, and that is *will of the Self* (*den Willen zum Selbst*)."[225]

This differentiation of the "methodological," i.e. transcendental, subject from the psychological one already allows definition of a clear cut difference between the rational conception of the subject as task and the irrational Nietzschean and Deleuzean one of the will to power and the psychological Ego which it should deny and substitute. Cohen clearly highlighted this difference: "So if we were to ask how and where self-consciousness exists without and beyond action, we would be posing a question which is the expression of the prejudice of the psychological Ego, which would be alright for the theoretical Ego at most, but is of no use at all for the Ego with a will; the latter should always and only be understood as a task, and never, as a psychological source and hearth (*psychologischer Quell und Herd*), as the power and strength of so-called self-consciousness."[226]

The Self, self-consciousness, as a pure, transcendental, non psychological, empirical subject is thus the "law of self-consciousness:" origin and task find their unity in the "law" and the rational, critical meaning of Idea as hypothesis finds its ethical expression: "The law must be acknowledged as the *foundation* placed in self-consciousness. However, the task of self-consciousness is the hypothesis of self-consciousness. And it has no other meaning than the task of the Self, reawakening of the Self. Thus the task of self-consciousness becomes the law of self-consciousness because it becomes the foundation of self-consciousness. In this case it is impossible to speak of an alien task; it is rather more profound carrying out of the basic idea of hypothesis, the one achieved in the requirement of law. And it is, at the same time, the clearest, natural removal of all that is egoistic, transitory and changeable in the isolated individual. Just as I manage to find my Self not in the Ego, but only in the Thou and We, in the same way, I manage to realise the task rising up in me in the first motion of will only by acknowledging self-consciousness as law, which I must recognise in the State."[227]

I should finally like to add a last remark on a further implication of the ethical meaning of "task," in Cohen's philosophy, so as to highlight another important difference between his rigorously rationalist idea of "pure will" and Deleuze's irrationalist theme of the "streams" of desire with reference to the problem of realisation.

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[225] *Ibid*., p. 259.

[226] *Ibid*., pp. 259f.

[227] *Ibid*., p. 266; cf. *ibid*., pp. 324f. Cf., on this, my essay on: *Autonomy of the Law*, in A. POMA, *Yearning for Form and Other Essays on Hermann Cohen's Thought*, cit., pp. 261–271.

If the de-subjectivised, de-teleologised streams of desire referred to by Deleuze[228] run through a body without organs with neither law nor end, neither sense nor form, nomadically and anarchically, action as an infinite task of production self-consciousness takes place in a sphere of realisation, "eternity," which is itself an infinite task and, at the same time, "assurance" (*Sicherung*) for the "effectual reality" (*Wirklichkeit*) of action.[229] This allows escape, on the one hand, from a rationalist-totalitarian conception of history as the identity of rational and real, and, on the other, from nihilist denial of history and the rationality of action. In Cohen's words: "What claims to resolve pure will in a harmonious peace by removing it from work and struggle, is not a reality of the ethical. We recognise the latter, on the other hand, precisely in the purpose of ethical activity: to be *infinite*.

In this infinity we do not see a defect or limit of eternity, but rather only its superiority. Certainly, in this development, the single level does not perfectly represent the reality of the ethical, but it should not be considered separately, if the problem is one of its relationship with the question of reality. The infinitely far off point to which it intrinsically refers from the conceptual point of view is included in each single level. *Eternity is for each single point this infinitely far off point* (…). Eternity is the objective, and as such the authentic content of pure will. Eternity means *eternal task*. Heaven and earth can even set, ethicality remains. We now understand better the value of the task: its solution, its reality are assured by eternity. *Eternity is their reality*."[230]

We can take a step further towards making explicit the "presupposition" of Cohen's philosophy and all philosophy that, in postmodern culture, aims at development by drawing inspiration from it, continuing the investigation so far pursued through the themes of "aspiration to truth," "petition" and "task," as far as other key themes developed by Cohen, mainly in aesthetics, but important in meaning and wideness of application for his whole philosophy. Here I shall restrict myself, for reasons of brevity, to a few general remarks on the themes of the sublime, humour and *Sehnsucht*.

In Deleuze's view, the theory of the "sublime" is the only case "in which Kant considers a faculty [the imagination] liberated from the form of a common sense, and discovers for it a truly legitimate 'transcendent' exercise."[231] In Kant's sublime, he continues, imagination and thought are subjected to the violence of difference and forced, beyond their limit, to perceive the unimaginable and unthinkable, i.e. "the unformed or the deformed in nature."[232]

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[228] Cf. G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'Anti-Œdipe*, cit.; G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. Mille plateaux*, cit.

[229] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., p. 410.

[230] *Ibid*., pp. 410ff. Cf., on this point, my essay on: *The Existence of the Ideal in Hermann Cohen's Ethics*, in A. POMA, *Yearning for Form and Other Essays on Hermann Cohen's Thought*, cit., pp. 273–293.

[231] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 187 note; Eng. trans. cit., p. 320.

[232] Cf. *ibid*., p. 187 note; Eng. trans. cit., p. 321.

Cohen, in a theory of the sublime rather different from Kant's, also interpreted this feeling as tension and elevation of the finite towards infinity, but considered it a "subordinate concept" (*Unterbegriff*) of the beautiful, whose meaning cannot be abstracted from correlation with the concept of "humour," understood as feeling of the realisation of the infinite in the finite.[233] Besides, (and this is even more important for the present comparison with Deleuze's perspective) Cohen, unlike Kant, denied that the ethical presupposition was prevalent in the feeling of the sublime and recognised the prevalence of the theoretical presupposition in the trend towards infinity. Cohen seems to have seen very lucidly the mystical result, clearly realised in Deleuze, of a sublime of the will to power. He showed how the ambiguous mixture of aesthetics and ethics, already present in Kant's sublime, had been developed and emphasised in romanticism,[234] which "has not yet died out, even in our own time,"[235] and denounced its mystical character, precisely linked to the claim to express the inexpressible by means of excess and immoderation: "But if nature, in its simplicity and isolated majesty of its calm greatness, appeared as an image of the sublime, and if, on the other hand, the ground of the sublime was placed in the ethical and thus in man, in this way it was being moved away from nature, the other danger for the aesthetic representation of the ethical arose from this: that the sublime only consisted in exaltation and an *excess of moral forces* and their expression. Limitation and moderation thus did not have the value of a sufficient representation of the sublime; it only appeared as a reduction of moral requirements, as lowering of the moral level to the lower *average*.

If this way of seeing is already dangerous for the conception of morality and pedagogical consideration of it, it is actual fatal from the aesthetic point of view. And here not only the danger of mysticism and religious *symbolism*, but also, and not less, that of aesthetic *balance* in general, of the calm of the work of art in its fundamental forms, of harmony in the system of its contrasting movements, are shaken by this conception."[236]

This in no way means that Cohen thought of aesthetic activity as an orthodox exercise of common sense, or as calm, peaceful contemplation of the fulfilled, possessed form. He saw art, as did Deleuze, as the finite tending towards the infinite of feeling, free of all normality in the use of the faculties and continually forced to its limit, but it is not subject to any form of "bad will," perversion and paradoxicality: on the contrary, it is inspired by the "good will" of realisation. This realisation is not presumptuous possession of form, but an infinite, though real process of the search for it: Cohen was entirely aware of the Faustian temptation to freeze and possess the beautiful form and was quite devoid of this temptation, but he was just as distant from the sceptical, gnostic temptation to despise any finite realisation of form as inadequate: ascetic irony as a libertine parody, both contrasting, but, in the end,

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[233] Cf. A. POMA, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, cit., pp. 140ff.

[234] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil: Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, 2 Bde., Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1912; repr. in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bde 8./9., 1982,, Bd. I (8.), pp. 9ff.

[235] *Ibid*., Bd. I, p. 11.

[236] *Ibid*, Bd. I, p. 256.

equivalent expressions of the mystical option, are not only alien to the "good will" of Cohen's philosophy, but represent a danger to be avoided for it and an antagonist to be fought.

In Deleuze's view, irony and humour are the two opposite and equivalent routes of transgression of the law: the first overturns the law referring back to principles and so tragically showing their non-originativeness and relativity; the second circumvents the law, descending towards the consequences and activating them with hypocritically and comically falsifying precision.[237] Actually what Deleuze calls humour is more like parody. Cohen also foregrounded humour as an important concept in aesthetics, complementary to and correlated with the sublime, and he elaborated it, extracting extremely important meanings, not only for aesthetics, but for all his thought, to the extent that, in my view, humour can be one of the key concepts for reading the whole of Cohen's philosophy.[238] Since the theme of humour is central, not only in Cohen, but also in much of postmodernism, I believe that it deserves specific, careful and well developed elaboration, which I cannot supply here: I believe, that is, that anyone intending to think postmodernism in the light of Cohen's philosophy, reflection on humour constitutes a true main highway, which should be followed very carefully. While postponing this intention to another occasion, I shall restrict myself here to a few remarks, so as to show how, in Cohen's view, humour, together with the sublime, in correlation with it, is an authentic moral and sentimental presupposition of thought: that which allows form to be thought as an infinite task, which is longed for, without, however, transfiguring it and annulling it in a transcendent absolute, which can only be thought and felt apophatically in the paradox of its simulacra.

For Cohen, if the sublime was the permanently unfulfilled trend of the finite towards the infinite, humour is smiling, benevolent feeling towards the actual realisations of this trend, the pacific ability to recognise the real immanence of Idea, form, in those realisations, albeit defective and incomplete ones. Deleuze wrote that, in the sublime, Kant led imagination to face "the unformed or the deformed in nature."[239] *Cohen's conception of humour precisely allowed denial of the identity of "unformed" and "deformed":* i.e. allowing recognition in the imperfect, defective form, of the true realisation, the unfulfilled but real immanence of form, of idea, its sole dwelling place. This allowed Cohen to found the possibility of aesthetics of the "ugly," whose meaning is the opposite and an alternative to Deleuze's method of perversion and simulacrum: "This is – wrote Cohen – the indispensable task of art, not to superficially cover over or disguise man's links, in his whole culture, with the

[237] Cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 12; Eng. trans. cit., p. 5.

[238] On the meaning of humour in the aesthetics and other spheres of philosophy dealt with by Cohen, cf., apart from my book *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, cit., pp. 140ff., my essays: *Cohen and Mozart. Considerations on Drama, the Beautiful and Humanitarianism in Cohen's Aesthetics*, in A. POMA, *Yearning for Form and Other Essays on Hermann Cohen's Thought*, cit., pp. 87–110; *The Portrait in Hermann Cohen's Aesthetics*, *ibid.*, pp. 145–168; *Humor in Religion: Peace and Contentment*, *ibid*., pp. 203–225; *Lyric Poetry and Prayer*, *ibid*., pp. 227–241.

[239] Cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 187 note; Eng. trans. cit., p. 321.

animal world. This link is represented, threateningly, for any truthfulness of art, by the ugly. This task belongs to the beautiful.

Is the ugly a problem of the beautiful? Humour supplies and establishes the answer. The ugly does not remain ugly; it becomes a stage of the beautiful, it is a stage of the beautiful. The beautiful is not, in itself, an object of art. It is only an Idea, only the general need and trust, the methodical task of pure feeling. This task is, firstly, resolved through the sublime, but, in an equally necessary way, by humour. For man's nature shows itself thoroughly and convincingly in the ugly. Love would not be true if it did not also wish to envelop (*Umfangen*) the ugly. Love envelops it, transforms it, makes it one of the stages of the beautiful. Love understands the ugly, filling it with its own power. Thus Satyr becomes Eros. *Love ennobles the animal, turning it into man*."[240]

Along this route, albeit a swift one, from aspiration to truth, petition, task, and finally the sublime and humour, I believe we have neared the implicit or sentimental presupposition animating Cohen's philosophy and which is indispensable for postmodern thought seeking inspiration in it: i.e. the *Sehnsucht* for form.

Anti-modernism, as has already been said, devastated the established forms of modernity that was too rigid in its schemes and presumptuously sure of them. This critical activity on the part of anti-modernism must be acknowledged as an inevitable, necessary activity by modernity itself, the critical and self-critical vocation of reason, which represents modernity no less, actually more than the dogmatic, totalitarian and technocratic degeneration of reason itself. Postmodern society and culture were born and live in the formless void left by this destructive activity. The Nietzschean theories of postmodernism, including that of Deleuze, which we have dealt with here and which is a good example of them, express and analyse, rather efficiently this situation of the absence of form, which constitutes the dominant experience of contemporary society and individuals, and they elaborate it programmatically in the positive sense of emancipation from form. God's death, proclaimed by Nietzsche, involving man's death as well, that of truth, the subject, the death of all forms, is now an established fact. Now the aim is life without regret in the absence of all form, in the Dionysian dizziness of the void, in the game of players in a theatre of simulacra. However, in my view, it is possible to propose to the present situation, still remaining faithful to it, and thus to the condition of the absence of form, a different evaluation and programmatic indication, referring back precisely to Cohen's thought. It has already been said that Deleuze's "bad will" and "misosophy" are implicit presuppositions of his thought, though to no lesser extent than "good will" and "philosophy" are for Plato's and the whole of critical idealism up to Cohen. Being open to inspiration by this "good will" of thought, affectivity and feeling in no way means being in favour of "return" of old or new form. It is not a

[240] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil: Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, 2 Bde., Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1912; repr. in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bde 8./9., 1982,, Bd. I (8.), pp. 288f. It is useful to compare this passage with the one with the opposite meaning in Deleuze regarding "animality" (*animalité*), "stupidity" (*bêtise*): cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 352f.; Eng. trans. cit. p. 275. Cf. also *supra*, pp. 22ff.

return to the past or reactionary "nostalgia" for old forms, which can no longer be put forward. Neither is it a "return to the future," or utopian evasion towards new forms and new stability and certainties, which would only have the appearance of the new inasmuch as they are placed in the future, but would actually be nothing more than a return to out dated dogmatism and orthodoxy. What inspiration by Cohen allows us to elaborate is the possibility of living and thinking in the present context of the absence of form contesting this very absence. It is a question of remaining faithful to the condition of contemporary man, but also to the dynamic aspect of this condition, to the unease it brings for society and individuals. Post-Nietzschean apology for the absence of form risks hiding behind a mask of strained gaiety, very close to the one we find in the media, a self-destructive void anxiety, which is very difficult to interpret in an emancipatory sense. Here it is significant that, in *Mille plateaux*, a later work than the one considered in this essay, Deleuze, with a totally unjustified, incoherent break with his own line of thought, almost as if he were worried and afraid about the consequences, should introduce an insistent call to "prudence," which should prevent self-destruction by overdose.[241]

Reflection on postmodernism inspired by Cohen could point to a different way of living the condition of the absence of form as *Sehnsucht for form*.

One could also make a concession to Deleuze by arguing that the implicit presupposition, the fundamental feeling of thought were not "common sense" and "good will," if they are understood as an excessive, uncritical certainty of the natural conjunction of thought with the true and good.[242] In this sense it can be conceded that thought is not "philosophy," if the latter is understood as "knowing" and not "learning,"[243] if "*φιλία*" is understood as "affinity" with knowledge and truth, which means contiguity, contact, customary, intimate association, possession.[244] But, one must ask, did authentic rational, critical philosophy really mean its "good will" to be taken in this sense? We all recall Socrates' ironic answer, in Plato's *Symposium*, to Agathon, who suggested a clumsy philosophy by contiguity and contact:[245] "I only wish that wisdom were the kind of thing one could share by sitting next to someone – if it flowed, for instance, from the one that was full to the one that was empty, like the water in two cups finding its level through a piece of worsted."[246] It is well known that Plato pointed to *Eros* as the true philosopher: he is "a lifelong

[241] Cf. G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. Mille plateaux*, cit., pp. 198f., 201, 330f., 348ff., 628, 632, 633f.; Eng. trans. B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 1987, pp. 160f., 162, 165f., 270, 284ff., 503, 506, 508.

[242] Cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 171f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 131.

[243] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 213ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 164ff.

[244] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 181, 185; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 139, 142.

[245] PLATO, *Symposium*, 175 c-d (Eng. trans. by Michael Joyce, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, including the Letters*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey) 1963, p. 53: "Here you are, Socrates. Come and sit next to me; I want to share this great thought that's just struck you in the porch next door. I'm sure you must have mastered it, or you'd still be standing there."

[246] *Ibid*., 175 d (Eng. trans. cit., p. 530).

seeker after truth,"[247] "what he gains will always ebb away as fast. So Love is never altogether in or out of need,"[248] since, Plato continues: he "stands, moreover, midway between ignorance and wisdom. You must understand that none of the gods are seekers after truth. They do not long for wisdom, because they are wise – and why should the wise be seeking the wisdom that is already theirs? Nor, for that matter, do the ignorant seek the truth or crave to be made wise. And indeed, what makes their case so hopeless is that, having neither beauty, nor goodness, nor intelligence, they are satisfied with what they are, and do not long for the virtues they have never missed."[249] Eros, Plato taught us, is longing for what we do not possess, for that "which is not yet to hand."[250] On the other hand, in the *Cratylos*, Plato differentiates desire for what is present (*ἵμερος*) from longing for what is not there (*πόθος*),[251] so that it appears one must conclude that philosophy, like Eros, is *πόθος* for what is "not present but absent, and in another place" (*ἄλλοθί που ὄν καὶ ἀπόν*).[252] Actually, however, Eros is more *ἵμερος* than *πόθος*, since it "is never altogether in or out of need:"[253] it longs for what it does not have, what is not present, but, at the same time, is not "elsewhere and far off," since it is just the presence of the absence of the desired object that sets off this kind of longing and feeling, which is the implicit presupposition of philosophy, the authentic meaning of its presupposed "good will." This feeling of love for the presence of an absence, *ἵμερος*, is Cohen's *Sehnsucht*.[254]

Thus, Deleuze's "misosophy," or "bad will," is not the only alternative to philosophy understood as presumptuous, pseudo-learned thought. The absence of form can also be seriously lived and thought as *Sehnsucht* for form, as the "profession" (*Bekenntnis*) of one's "love" (*Liebe*) and "passion" (*Leidenschaft*) of this love[255] for the presence of the absence of form. The "Theatrum philosophicum," which is no longer a "representation of concepts," must not necessarily become a "drama of Ideas," in Deleuze's pulsional, violent sense:[256] it can and must be, on the other hand, "lyric poetry of Ideas," whose inexhaustible though meaningful theme is *Sehnsucht* for form. The absence of form, of every form, and the bent or dissolved Ego can still stand in a different relationship than the violent, irrational one of the anarchical streams of desire: this relationship is *Sehnsucht*, where the Ego receives, not so much its static, identical consistency as much as its dynamism, its direction, from Idea, Form, precisely inasmuch as it is absent, i.e. it *is present* (it is there) *as*

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[247] *Ibid*., 203 d (Eng. trans. cit., p. 556).

[248] *Ibid*., 203 e (Eng. trans. cit., p. 556).

[249] *Ibid*., 203 e-204 a (Eng. trans. cit., p. 556).

[250] *Ibid*., 200, especially 200 e (Eng. trans. cit., p. 553).

[251] PLATO, *Cratylos*, 420 a (Eng. trans. by Benjamin Jowett, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, including the Letters*, cit., p. 455).

[252] *Ibidem*.

[253] PLATO, *Symposium*, 203 e (Eng. trans. cit., p. 556).

[254] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil: Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, 2 Bde., Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1912; repr. in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bde 8./9., 1982,, Bd. II (9.), p. 279.

[255] Cf. *ibid.*, Bd. I, p. 393; Bd. II, p. 26.

[256] Cf. *supra*, p. 33.

absent. *Sehnsucht* is the "idealisation of the Self." This is how Cohen described it in his commentary on a wonderful song of Mignon in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*:[257] "*Sehnsucht* is above all an expansive feeling of the Ego; it spreads the Ego beyond the limits within which it must move and feel itself. But depression immediately appears, or rather it constitutes a concomitant factor. Solitude is the content of this depression, and only from it does the strength to move towards the outside grow, beyond this restriction, almost beyond this shrivelling up of which the spirit has become a victim. Only he who knows *Sehnsucht*, – ah he knows and loves me (*Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, – ach der mich liebt und kennt*). These are the two cornerstones of knowledge: *Sehnsucht* and he who knows me. The Ego is tensely included in this correlation. Thus he moves almost entirely back behind he who knows me and behind *Sehnsucht*. Only he who knows *Sehnsucht* knows me. Only *Sehnsucht*, only this suffering fills the Ego. It is in this suffering of *Sehnsucht* for he who knows me that the Ego is dissolved. Only he who knows *Sehnsucht*, only he knows what I suffer, only he knows what I am. This is love. This is the passion of love (…).

Thus *Sehnsucht* is the most intimate interiorisation simply by means of the idealisation of the Self. Admittedly, idealisation cannot uproot the entire multiplicity and ambiguity which is still linked to the Ego. Thus all sophistry of subjectivity comes close up. Thus the monologue of the *Sehnsucht* becomes a dialogue, a duel between lovers, or even that of a single partner in the various phases of his love or under the different connected effect of other feelings."[258]

The object of *Sehnsucht* is at the same time absent and present; it is the *presence of an absence*. Therefore *Sehnsucht* for form is actually and seriously a feeling of absence and, correlatively, *Sehnsucht* for presence. It is non-orthodox, anti-conformist courage in supporting the condition of absence, but without anxiety, because the absence of presence is kept present and the absent present inspires the incessant *Sehnsucht*, the "*Sehnsucht* for search" In *Sehnsucht* for form the antidote to anxiety is "confidence" (*Zuversicht*),[259] which is not possession, nor acquired

[257] Cf. J.W. GOETHE, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Book 4, chap. 11, in *Goethes Werke*, hg. im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen, Fotomechanischer Nachdruck der im Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, Weimar 1887–1919 eschienenen Weimarer Ausgabe oder Sophien-Ausgabe, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1987, 1. Abteilung, Bd. 22, p. 67. Here is the well known text of the poem: "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt/ Weiß, was ich leide!/ Allein und abgetrennt/ Von aller Freude,/ Seh' ich an's Firmament/ Nach jener Seite./ Ach! der mich liebt und kennt/ Ist in der Weite./ Es schwindelt mir, es brennt/ Mein Eingeweide./ Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt/ Weiß, was ich leide!" Franz Schubert used the poem for a well known *Lied* (Op. 62 n. 4, D 877), to which Cohen referred in H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil: Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, 2 Bde., Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1912; repr. in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bde 8./9., 1982,, Bd. II (9.), pp. 184f.

[258] *Ibid*., Bd. II, pp. 26f.

[259] Cf. *ibid*., Bd. I, p. 37.

certainty, but "forecast" (*Zu-versicht*),[260] anticipation while waiting, the culture of waiting as an incessant search.

In this sense Cohen's perspective is the heir to that critical modernity which has never considered form acquired possession, but an infinite task, and which has incessantly directed its criticism against all dogmatic certainty and violent totalitarianism. Now, however, in the postmodern condition of the absence of form, critical philosophy must take on a new task, together with the traditional one. If, on the one hand, it must continue to question the false certainties present, above all, in capitalist and technocratic dogmatism, on the other, it must reawaken *Sehnsucht* for form, in the face of Dionysian scepticism and Cynicism of the culture of ephemera and simulacra. Thus two alternatives routes are opened up in reflection on postmodernism and its understanding. On the one hand, we have the dramatic-Dionysian Nietzschean perspective, for which the condition of the absence of form is accepted and taken up as a fully emancipated condition; on the other, there is a lyric perspective, for which it is in the condition of the absence of form, albeit without illusory evasions from this condition, that the open meaning of this absence, the presence of absence as an opening towards the presence of form is incessantly cultivated in feeling and thought. The latter alternative is the one we can build up drawing inspiration from the philosophy of Hermann Cohen.

[260] This is actually the original meaning of the German word "Zuversicht," which is still contained in its present meaning. Cf. J. und W. GRIMM, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, bearbeitet von Gustav Rosenhagen und der Arbeitsstelle des Deutschen Wörterbuches zu Berlin, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1984, Bd. 32, coll. 879ff.

Cadenza 2
Passions in Postmodernism

1. Affection and the "Body Without Organs"

When considering the notion of "passion" both in its ordinary and in its philosophical meaning, one should firstly take note of its plurivocity. An analysis, brief as it may be, of the set and the implications of meanings that make up this concept must distinguish at least three basic meanings: (1) the most general meaning of passion as *affection*; (2) that of passion as *emotion of the soul*; (3) that of *dominant sentiment* that determines or significantly influences one's personality and behaviour.

Consider the first meaning, that of *affection* (*πάθος*). In this sense, the notion of passion is already present in Aristotle's philosophy as a category of being: that by which the entity is modified by an external action, that is, undergoes an action. Therefore, affection doesn't have, as such, a moral or exclusively anthropological meaning, but rather a generally ontological one: one can say of an entity that it is affected by something, that is, it is undergoing an external action, which changes it.

If one tried to find this notion in the current theory of postmodernism,[1] one would immediately stumble upon an insurmountable obstacle. In fact, as general as the meaning of "affection" may be, it implies at least one presupposition, on which it depends: namely, that one can refer to an entity that undergoes the action. This assumption, in hindsight, is far from minimal, because it involves the entire classical ontology of substance. Even when modern culture overcame the old ontology, abandoning it altogether or reforming it at the root, it still replaced the substantial entity with a stable unit, to which one could assign categories and thus also affection: the subject (and its correlate, the object). But in postmodernism there is nothing left of all this: every identity is definitely abandoned and denied. Not only are being and reality no longer understood as a system of interrelations between

[1] By "postmodernism" I mean here, in a summary and not strictly defined way, the culture expressed by contemporary society (at least in the first world), and by "postmodern theory" I mean the multiple and diverse set of philosophical theories that intend to express, analyse, interpret and programmatically address that culture.

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substances, but the identity of the subject is also radically deconstructed. The theory of difference rejects any reduction of the anarchic multiplicity of events to the organic unity of representation – and therefore it also rejects the subject as a permanent and foundational identity at every level: empirical, psychological, phenomenological and even transcendental. But without an entity or a subject of affection, even the latter loses all meaning.

How to describe reality, once any reference to the entity or the subject has been rejected? All that is left is an undetermined and absolutely non-individuated field crossed by flows that are not going in the direction of any organic unification: it is the "body without organs." Among the many texts related to the theory of postmodernism, I will quote a few passages from *Mille plateaux* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: "Where psychoanalysis says, 'Stop, find your self again,' we should say instead, 'Let's go further still, we haven't found our B[ody]w[ithout]O[rgans] yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self.' Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation (…). The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and signifiances and subjectifications as a whole (…). A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. Still, the BwO is not a scene, a place, or even a support upon which something comes to pass. It has nothing to do with phantasy, there is nothing to interpret. The BwO causes intensities to pass; it produces and distributes them in a *spatium* that is itself intensive, lacking extension. It is not space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree – to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced. It is nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity, intensity = 0; but there is nothing negative about that zero, there are no negative or opposite intensities. Matter equals energy. Production of the real as an intensive magnitude starting at zero. That is why we treat the BwO as the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs, before the formation of the strata; as the intense egg defined by axes and vectors, gradients and thresholds, by dynamic tendencies involving energy transformation and kinematic movements involving group displacement, by migrations: all independent of *accessory forms* because the organs appear and function here only as pure intensities."[2]

The body without organs, then, *is* nothing – let alone a subject. There is no subject, but only "desiring machines:" "**It** is at work everywhere [*Ça fonctionne partout*], functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks."[3] The body without organs is no other than the recording or inscription surface[4] of the flows of desire: the "enormous undifferentiated

[2] G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie. Mille plateaux*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1980, pp. 187–190; Eng. trans. B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 1987, p. 151–153.

[3] G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schzophrénie. L'Anti-Œdipe*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1972, p. 7; Eng. trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, H. L. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983, p. 1.

[4] Cf. *ibid*., p. 18 *passim*; Eng. trans. cit., p. 12 *passim*.

object,"[5] amorphous, catatonic, unproductive, bearing the inscription of the flows of desire and their disruption, simultaneously rejecting those flows and appropriating them. All is flow and interruption of flow, in an incessant production process, which is distributed on the body without organs.

2. The Emotion and the Emancipation of Desire

Now we can move on to compare the postmodern context with the second meaning of the word "passion." As I have noted, "passion" has a traditional meaning as "emotion." This meaning is not entirely foreign to the one of "affection" I have just considered, indeed it implies it, but it also determines it further as that affection which involves pleasure and pain.[6] This characteristic puts the notion of "passion" in an unbreakable connection with that of "desire." According to the tradition, Thomas Aquinas attributes passions to "concupiscible" or "irascible" appetites, while specifying that the passions of this second type presuppose those of the first type.[7] Passion is an emotion accompanied by pleasure or displeasure related to the realization or non-realization of the object that moves the soul, that is, the object of desire. The previous few references to the fundamental role of the flows of desire in postmodernism already seem to suggest that here there is an important subject area in which this culture meets the traditional discourse on passions. Yet it is not entirely so, because of an essential difference in the meaning of "desire." In the tradition, in fact, desire is generally connected with "lack" and "need." Even Thomas, in considering passions as "movements of the appetitive faculty," distinguishes them according to the lack or the attainment of a connatural object.[8] This connection between passion, desire and lack goes through the whole history of thought, from ancient times up to Freud, and has been crucial in its many implications: anthropological, psychological, moral, political, etc. Now, this very connection is completely abandoned, indeed rejected, in postmodernism.

The body without organs is crossed by nomadic and anarchist "flows of desire," without origin or end, completely immanent to themselves, and consistent. These are mere intensities, energy or power flows, neither generated by lack nor aimed at pleasure. Deleuze and Guattari wrote: "To a certain degree, the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset: from the very first step that the Platonic logic of desire forces us to take, making us choose between *production* and *acquisition*. From the moment that we place desire on the side of acquisition, we make desire an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception, which causes us to look upon

[5] *Ibid*., p. 13; Eng. trans., p. 7.

[6] Cf. *Et. nic*. II, 4, 1105b 21.

[7] Cf. *ST* 1a-2ae q.23 a.4.

[8] Cf. *ibidem*.

it as primarily a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of the real object."[9] It's true – continue Deleuze and Guattari – that tradition, from Kant to psychoanalysis, also presented desire as production, but always only as production of psychic objects, ghosts, which do not eliminate the lack but rather double it and make it infinite in the parallel world of imagination.[10] Postmodernism is also the revelation and denunciation of this deception and therefore the emancipation of desire. The immanence, the consistency of desire, and thus its independence from lack and pleasure, are essential characters to understand postmodernism. As I have chosen to do from the beginning, I'll let the authors of postmodernism speak for themselves, through the quotation of relatively large passages, also to highlight a writing style that is itself a significant character of the new culture. Deleuze and Guattari wrote: "Every time desire is betrayed, cursed, uprooted from its field of immanence, a priest is behind it. The priest cast the triple curse on desire: the negative law, the extrinsic rule, and the transcendent ideal. Facing north, the priest said, Desire is lack (how could it not lack what it desires?). The priest carried out the first sacrifice, named castration, and all the men and women of the north lined up behind him, crying in cadence, 'Lack, lack, it's the common law.' Then, facing south, the priest linked desire to pleasure. For there are hedonistic, even orgiastic, priests. Desire will be assuaged by pleasure; and not only will the pleasure obtained silence desire for a moment but the process of obtaining it is already a way of interrupting it, of instantly discharging it and unburdening oneself of it. Pleasure as dis-charge: the priest carries out the second sacrifice, named masturbation. Then, facing east, he exclaimed: *Jouissance* is impossible, but impossible *jouissance* is inscribed in desire. For that, in its very impossibility, is the Ideal, the '*manque-a-jouir* that is life.' The priest carried out the third sacrifice, phantasy or the thousand and one nights, the one hundred twenty days, while the men of the East chanted: Yes, we will be your phantasy, your ideal and impossibility, yours and also our own. The priest did not turn to the west. He knew that in the west lay a plane of consistency, but he thought that the way was blocked by the columns of Hercules, that it led nowhere and was uninhabited by people. But that is where desire was lurking, west was the shortest route east, as well as to the other directions, rediscovered or deterritorialized."[11]

Deleuze and Guattari apply this conception of desire to two interesting examples. The first, taken from psychopathology, is masochism. Priests-psychoanalysts interpret it through the three principles of Pleasure, Death and Reality, whereas Deleuze and Guattari have a different view on the matter: "the masochist's suffering is the price he must pay, not to achieve pleasure, but to untie the pseudobond between desire and pleasure as an extrinsic measure. Pleasure is in no way something that can be attained only by a detour through suffering; it is something that must be delayed as long as possible because it interrupts the continuous process of

[9] Cf. G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schzophrénie. L'Anti-Œdipe*, cit., p. 32; Eng. trans. cit., p. 25.

[10] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 32f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 25f.

[11] G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie. Mille plateaux*, cit., p. 191; Eng. trans. cit., p. 154.

positive desire. There is, in fact, a joy that is immanent to desire as though desire were filled by itself and its contemplations, a joy that implies no lack or impossibility and is not measured by pleasure since it is what distributes intensities of pleasure and prevents them from being suffused by anxiety, shame, and guilt. In short, the masochist uses suffering as a way of constituting a body without organs and bringing forth a plane of consistency of desire."[12]

The second example is taken from literature: it is courtly love. "It would be an error to interpret courtly love in terms of a law of lack or an ideal of transcendence. The renunciation of external pleasure, or its delay, its infinite regress, testifies on the contrary to an achieved state in which desire no longer lacks anything but fills itself and constructs its own field of immanence. Pleasure is an affection of a person or a subject; it is the only way for persons to 'find themselves' in the process of desire that exceeds them; pleasures, even the most artificial, are reterritorializations. But the question is precisely whether it is necessary to find oneself. Courtly love does not love the self, any more than it loves the whole universe in a celestial or religious way. It is a question of making a body without organs upon which intensities pass, self and other – not in the name of a higher level of generality or a broader extension, but by virtue of singularities that can no longer be said to be personal, and intensities that can no longer be said to be extensive. The field of immanence is not internal to the self, but neither does it come from an external self or a nonself. Rather, it is like the absolute Outside that knows no Selves because interior and exterior are equally a part of the immanence in which they have fused. 'Joy' in courtly love, the exchange of hearts, the test or 'assay:' everything is allowed, as long as it is not external to desire or transcendent to its plane, or else internal to persons. The slightest caress may be as strong as an orgasm; orgasm is a mere fact, a rather deplorable one, in relation to desire in pursuit of its principle. Everything is allowed: all that counts is for pleasure to be the flow of desire itself. Immanence, instead of a measure that interrupts it or delivers it to the three phantoms, namely, internal lack, higher transcendence, and apparent exteriority. If pleasure is not the norm of desire, it is not by virtue of a lack that is impossible to fill but, on the contrary, by virtue of its positivity, in other words, the plane of consistency it draws in the course of its process."[13]

3. The Dominant Sentiment and the System of Cynicism

Finally, let's come to the third meaning of "passion," which highlights how the affection or emotion in question has the power to govern one's behaviour. This meaning is of primary importance, especially in the field of ethics, because passions have been themed as a moral problem only in relation to it. In fact, if passions are able to determine the subject's behaviour outside of his control, there is the problem

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 192; Eng. trans. cit., p. 155.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 193f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 156.

of the repression of passions, or at least their government and discipline through moral codes (philosophical or religious or other: I shall deal with it just now), that is, through doctrines and pedagogies of virtues. In fact, in the philosophical tradition, even in the most ancient one, passions have sometimes been considered mainly in their aspect of physical affections, in which case their control was configured more as therapy than as a moral doctrine. In other cases the emphasis was mainly on the rational or spiritual character of the regulating principle, and the government discipline of the passions was depicted as a moral doctrine, based on philosophical or religious foundations. Often paths were taken that resulted from the combination of these two perspectives. What remained constant was the need for a codification of passions that, while not eliminating them, would regulate them, limiting their destabilizing effects and conveniently finalizing their productive energy. The epic undertaking by which the principle of form (reason, will of God, or more) submits the forces unleashed by passions and channels them towards its own good end explicitly or implicitly underlies many, though not all, moral doctrines. In this perspective, as we can see, the consideration of passions encompasses new aspects and meanings, important links with other concepts, such as those of "power," "violence," "conflict," "repression" and others.

Postmodern theory does not ignore this situation, but does not regard it as the most significant for society and the current culture. We have seen above how the body without organs reacts to flows of desire that run through it by repelling them and appropriating them at the same time. It therefore works in respect of desiring intensities as a *socius* that inscribes them in itself, thereby codifying them. At least that is what happened in all pre-capitalist societies: "Desiring-production also exists from the beginning: there is desiring-production from the moment there is social production and reproduction. But in a very precise sense it is true that precapitalist social machines are inherent in desire: they code it, they code the flows of desire. To code desire – and the fear, the anguish of decoded flows – is the business of the socius."[14] The primitive territorial machine, as well as the despotic barbarian machine, inhibits circulation and exchange of flows of desire by inscribing them in the body of the *socius*: the earth in the first case, the despot in the second. "The prime function incumbent upon the socius, has always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly dammed up, channelled, regulated."[15]

Therefore the primitive territorial machine becomes a "system of cruelty,"[16] due to which the flows and the production organs do not circulate freely or have any autonomy, but are inscribed in the collective and impersonal territorial body: "Cruelty has nothing to do with some ill-defined or natural violence that might be commissioned to explain the history of mankind; cruelty is the movement of culture that is realized in bodies and inscribed on them, belabouring them. That is what

[14] G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schzophrénie. L'Anti-Œdipe*, cit., p. 163; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 40; Eng. trans. cit., p. 33.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 169 *passim*; Eng. trans. cit., p. 145 *passim*.

cruelty means. This culture is not the movement of ideology, on the contrary, it forcibly injects production into desire, and conversely, it forcibly inserts desire into social production and reproduction. For even death, punishment, and torture are desired, and are instances of production (…). It makes men or their organs into the parts and wheels of the social machine."[17]

The despotic State supervenes on the territorial machine, producing an "overcoding" that, on the one hand, leaves intact the territorial inscriptions, but on the other hand, overwrites them all in the body without organs of the "Despot:" "The full body as socius has ceased to be the earth, it has become the body of the despot, the despot himself or his god. The prescriptions and prohibitions that often render him almost incapable of acting make of him a body without organs. He is the sole quasi cause, the source and fountainhead and estuary of the apparent objective movement. In place of mobile detachments from the signifying chain, a detached object has jumped outside the chain; in place of flow selections, all the flows converge into a great river that constitutes the sovereign's consumption."[18] The body without organs of the despot appropriates each production and each flow; not the circulation of flows, but the "debt infinite"[19] is the regime of the despotic machine, and "terror" is the new system that is to replace the "cruelty:" "There occurs a detachment and elevation of the death instinct, which ceases to be coded in the interplay of savage actions and reactions where fatalism was still something en-acted, in order to become the somber agent of overcoding, the detached object that hovers over each subject, as though the social machine had come unstuck from its desiring-machines: death, the desire of desire, the desire of the despot's desire, a latency inscribed in the bowels of the State apparatus. Better not a sole survivor than for a single organ to flow outside this apparatus or slip away from the body of the despot. This is because there is no other necessity (no other fatum) than that of the signifier in its relationships with its signifieds: such is the regime of terror."[20]

If cruelty and terror are the coding systems of flows of desire in pre-capitalist societies, with the advent of capitalism there is a radical change: "capitalism is the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of decoded flows, substituting for intrinsic codes an axiomatic of abstract quantities in the form of money."[21] Capitalism cancels all coding systems and inaugurates a system of free and deterritorialized circulation of the flows of desire. When the capital appropriates the production, each encoded value is supplanted by the circulation itself as a value, by the exchange value; everything is made homogeneous and undifferentiated by the abstract form of money and there is no outer limit to the energy flows that run through the body without organs, but only their regulation, an axiomatic, which orders them in the capital: "Capitalism forms when the flow of unqualified wealth encounters the flow of unqualified labor and conjugates with it (…). This amounts

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 170; Eng. trans. cit., p. 145.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 230: Eng. trans. cit., p. 194.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 234 *passim*; Eng. trans. cit., p. 197 *passim*.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 252; Eng. trans. cit., p. 213.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 163; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

to saying that capitalism forms with *a general axiomatic of decoded flows*."[22] Axiomatic is very different from codification. Deleuze and Guattari define the difference as follows: "the axiomatic deals directly with purely functional elements and relations whose nature is not specified, and which are immediately realized in highly varied domains simultaneously; codes, on the other hand, are relative to those domains and express specific relations between qualified elements that cannot be subsumed by a higher formal unity (overcoding) except by transcendence and in an indirect fashion."[23]

In the capitalist society we live in, the systems of cruelty and terror are replaced by the system of cynicism: the flows of desire circulate freely and indifferently, not codified, but only axiomatized according to the rules of their conjunction in reference to the capital. It is a system with no internal limits, because it is able to push those limits, to always extend its axiomatic further, to regulate any new flow of desire that threatens to fall out of the system. Apparently, therefore, there is a maximum freedom of movement for the flows of desire; in fact, though, this is the system that more than any other is able to control any flow of desire in a cynical and generalized way. And do not think that the degree of totalitarianism of the system is proportional to the multiplication of the axioms. Quite the opposite: the "social democracy" tends to regulate the system by adding new axioms; the totalitarian state, instead, tends to minimize them: "The 'totalitarianism' pole of the State incarnates this tendency to restrict the number of axioms, and operates by the exclusive promotion of the foreign sector: the appeal to foreign sources of capital, the rise of industries aimed at the exportation of foodstuffs or raw materials, the collapse of the domestic market. The totalitarian State is not a maximum State but rather (…) the *minimum State* of anarcho-capitalism."[24]

4. Capitalism and Schizophrenia

As we see, the description – albeit very brief – that I tried to give of the contemporary situation (I referred to Deleuze and Guattari, but one could obviously expand the references to many other authors) radically subverts the classic theme of passions and their control. In contemporary society passions do not constitute affections or emotions arising from a lack or a need and therefore as impulses towards the subject's fulfilment or pleasure, but as pure desiring energy flows without origin and without a goal, not attributable to any subject, but erring on an undifferentiated body. There is no instance that qualifies and determines them, but only an axiomatic system that, in a cynical indifference, does not inhibit, hierarchize or encode them

[22] G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie. Mille plateaux*, cit., p. 565; Eng. trans. cit., p. 453.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 567; Eng. trans. cit., p. 454.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 578; Eng. trans. cit., p. 462.

in any way, but, on the contrary, stimulates their circulation, only joining them in the impersonal body of the capital.

If an ethical issue arises in this situation, it does not qualify as a moral problem of individual subjects, but rather as a political problem, which some say can only have an aesthetic solution. The problem is how to dissociate the flows of desire from the global and cynical system of capitalist axiomatization. Any critical or dialectic situation is excluded: any opposition or challenge to the system is instantly recognized by the latter as one of the many energy flows, which claims to rise as a limit to the system, but which is immediately absorbed by the latter by adjusting the axiomatic and therefore by moving the limit. The ways to emancipation rather go in the direction of subversion and deconstruction. The point is to identify the possibility of energy flows that escape the power of the capitalist axiomatic. Deleuze and Guattari identify an "absolute limit" of capitalism in schizophrenia (not the disease, which is indeed a product of capitalism itself defending itself, but the schizophrenic process): "capitalism is indeed the limit of all societies, insofar as it brings about the decoding of the flows that the other social formations coded and overcoded. But it is the *relative* limit of every society; it effects *relative* breaks, because it substitutes for the codes an extremely rigorous axiomatic that maintains the energy of the flows in a bound state on the body of capital as a socius that is deterritorialized, but also a socius that is even more pitiless than any other. Schizophrenia, on the contrary, is indeed the *absolute* limit that causes the flows to travel in a free state on a desocialized body without organs. Hence one can say that schizophrenia is the *exterior* limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit, by substituting for it its own *immanent* relative limits, which it continually reproduces on a widened scale. It axiomatizes with one hand what it decodes with the other."[25]

If, on the one hand, capitalism is a system of decoding and deterritorialization of the flows of desire, on the other hand, through the axiomatic, it must submit them to reterritorialization and recoding, to keep them linked and functional to the body of the capital. Hence the eternal capitalist tension between the utopia of a society without state and the temptation of a despotic state. Schizophrenia – that is, the flows of desire as pure lines of flight, without integration – pushes the emancipatory tendency of capitalism over the edge, saving it from the axiomatizing tendency. In doing so it effectively subverts the system, which is based on that paradoxical compromise: "the schizophrenic escape itself does not merely consist in withdrawing from the social, in living on the fringe: it causes the social to take flight through the multiplicity of holes that eat away at it and penetrate it, always coupled directly to it, everywhere setting the molecular charges that will explode what must explode, make fall what must fall, make escape what must escape, at each point ensuring the conversion of schizophrenia as a process into an effectively revolutionary force."[26]

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[25] G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'Anti-Œdipe*, cit., p. 292; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 245f.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 408; Eng. trans. cit., p. 341.

Obviously one can agree or disagree with the outcome I have summarily mentioned here and with many others, proposed by various authors, that here I could not speak of. One can accept, reject, modify them, or propose entirely different ones. But I believe that one cannot engage in dialogue with postmodernism without taking into account the profound changes that took place in postmodern culture, which cast off many categories of traditional thought.

Cadenza 3
Critical Idealism at the Time of Difference

The philosophy of Hermann Cohen is certainly, in all respects, idealistic. Jacob Klatzkin writes: "As a philosopher Hermann Cohen was the strictest idealist of our time."[1] However, in my opinion, Cohen's idealism – radically different and in some ways opposed to Fichte's, Schelling's and Hegel's speculative and absolute idealism – is not refuted by the numerous criticisms that the latter received by different thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the same way, I believe it isn't refuted by the criticism that idealism is a totalitarian philosophy of identity, as posited by the theorists of postmodernism. In fact, Cohen's idealism can be proposed even today, as a reference philosophy for developments that address the problems raised by culture in our age.

In the first edition of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Cohen thus defines idealism: "Resolving the differences between things by means of distinctions between ideas: this is the secret of idealism."[2] In this work he distinguishes two complementary aspects of "transcendental idealism" in Kant's philosophy: "critical idealism" "as to the method" and "formal idealism" "as to the content."[3] Kant's critical and transcendental idealism, for Cohen, lies in having inaugurated the method for which a formal a priori, devoid of any metaphysical or psychological meaning, is intended only as a formal condition of the possibility of phenomenal experience: "the a priori is only conceivable in the form, the form as only referred to the phenomenon: so the a priori now constructs an experience, which wants to be nothing more than a *set of phenomena*. The a priori harbours the foundation of the new kind of idealism that Kant founded by deducing it from the theory of space and time."[4] The critical and transcendental meaning of idealism as the foundation method is integrated in Kant

[1] J. KLATZKIN, *Hermann Cohen*, Jüdischer Verlag, Berlin 1919, p. 28.

[2] H. COHEN, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, in IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Bd. 1., III, Georg Olms, Hildesheim – New York 1987, p. 270.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 252.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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by the formal meaning of it, as to content, with the theory of empirical reality and transcendental ideality of space and time. The recognition of the a-priori nature not only of the forms of intellect but also of the forms of sensibility – the equal dignity and necessary complementarity so attached to both – makes it possible to conceive knowledge as a priori synthesis: "The category alone – Cohen writes – does not make the object: one must add sensible intuition; and it has exactly the same rights to be a formal condition of experience. It is formal idealism that distinguishes transcendental idealism from the empirical one and makes of it an empirical realism."[5]

In the following – extensively revised and extended – edition of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Cohen insists on the meaning of critical idealism as a transcendental method, while giving less importance to formal idealism. In fact, it reduces the difference between forms of thought and forms of sensibility to a mere difference of methods of knowledge. Also based on his deep reflection on the philosophy of Plato and Leibniz, Cohen changes the meaning of critical idealism mainly in the direction of the foundation of knowledge and being, which is its object, in the purity of thought. Cohen's mature conception of critical idealism consists in the method of purity, as the foundation of being in thought. Thought is the idea in the Platonic sense, though not interpreted as an intellectual intuition but as "hypothesis," that is, as a method by which reason "accounts" for itself and its contents.

Critical idealism, therefore, is mainly rationalism as a method of rational foundation: the idea is not a vision of a transcendent being compared to reason, but rather the hypothesis and method of the rational foundation of being in the purity of thought: this is the first and fundamental difference between false idealism and true idealism – critical idealism, which "is scientific rationalism, the one founded logically."[6]

Cohen's critical idealism is characterized by a pure and methodological conception of the idea: the idea is a hypothesis, that is, the method of purity. Thought is not representation but judgment, and the idea is not content but form: the formal origin of every content of knowledge. This conception of idealism is emancipated from any ontological perspective, because, despite being essentially a foundational thought, it does not recognize any foundation other than the method of the foundation itself. Cohen writes: "The foundation, in its essential formality, means the dual direction of scientific idealism: *only recognizing the foundation in founding; but also being sure and certain of the foundation in founding*."[7] The idea, therefore, does not represent in any way a content, let alone an essence, but it represents the very method of the hypothesis: the method of foundation of pure thought. And therefore, just as it differs from the absolute identity of the ontological foundation, so it is also far from the plurality of representative psychological contents. Cohen

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 244f.

[6] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1902, 1914[2]; the latter edition was reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Georg Olms, Hildesheim-New York, Bd. 6, 1977, p. 500.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 305.

explains: "*The idea, not its multiplicity, characterizes idealism*. The value of ideas, as many as they may be, lies in the value of the idea. *Only through the idea does purity acquire its methodical value*."[8]

Due to this conception, some have accused Cohen of having formulated an "idealism without a subject:"[9] such an accusation today, in the culture of the end of the subject, becomes a source of interest. Nicolai Hartmann, among others, criticized the Marburgean idealism as a theory that "makes the thesis of idealism absolutely radical and resolves into ideal products even the last remaining realities, the thing itself and the 'subject in general.'"[10] According to Hartmann, it is not even idealism any more, but rather a logicism and – as it takes its task to be the foundation not of common knowledge, but of scientific knowledge – a "scientism" and a "methodology."[11] In fact, thought, as the origin and foundation of every content, lies beyond both the subject and the object; the latter is no longer a function of the subject, because there is no longer a subject and an object, but only functions of the *logos* – a subjectification and an objectification of the *logos*. The primacy of thought over being – which is the fundamental principle of Cohen's idealism, for which thought posits being – does not refer to a positing subject other than the same methodological principle of being. So, for Hartmann, Marburgean idealism is paradoxically a "subjectivism without a subject." Hartmann writes: "In opposition to empirical and transcendental subjectivism one may indicate that of logical idealism as 'logical subjectivism.' It is the paradox of a 'subjectivism without a subject' and must bear as its consequence the entire internal split of such a paradox."[12]

When discussing this criticism to critical idealism, Manfred Brelage highlights the reasons why the latter is different from any metaphysical conception of the absolute subject as well as from any psychological conception of the empirical subject. He clarifies that: "Critical idealism is not an idealism of the subject, but of the *idea*; it takes its name not from Locke's idea in its sense of representation, but from Plato's idea in its interpretation as hypothesis, law, principle of validity (*geltender Wert*). This law – and not the spirit – is the absolute that is the foundation of all knowledge. It is basically the subject of all knowledge, which gives it objectivity."[13] So, the transcendental subject, freed from any metaphysical and psychological meaning, is the principle of validity of knowledge, lying beyond the subject-object relationship, which it founds. Brelage writes: "Pure thought, consciousness in general, reason, logos, or otherwise sounding titles under which criticism has analysed the complex of principles which underpin the original relatedness of knowledge and object of knowledge, are in fact a principle in which the gnoseological reflection

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[9] Cf. M. BRELAGE, *Studien zur Transzendentalphilosophie*, Walter De Gruyter & Co., Berlin 1965, p. 97.

[10] N. HARTMANN, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, Walter De Gruyter & Co., Berlin 1965[5], p. 160.

[11] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 161.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 163.

[13] M. BRELAGE, *op. cit.*, pp. 94f.

encounters an ultimate foundation. All autonomy of knowledge is founded on them. As it is made possible by them, knowledge does not refer to beings in themselves, but to pure concepts and principles, which originate from itself. Pure thought as an absolute principle of knowledge: this is the theme of the transcendental logic of criticism. In this, criticism has focussed on ensuring the absoluteness of this principle in two respects. On the one hand, it stressed the independence of this pure thought from every presupposition of a being in itself; on the other hand, it highlighted the independence of pure thought from concrete subjectivity. The assurance of the former came about with its defence of the independence of transcendental logic from metaphysics; the assurance of the latter came with the defence of its independence from psychology."[14]

So, critical idealism of course thematises the transcendental subject, but does not assign him in any way the significance of totalitarian identity that reduces any difference to itself, challenged and rejected by postmodern thought. Pure thought, for critical idealism, is rather the principle and the method that posits the object and the subject itself as an infinite task.

Critical idealism also has an important ethical dimension. Ethics, both for Cohen and for Kant, is an "extension" of knowledge, not only because it is an extension of the method of purity to the foundation of the human sciences, but also because it represents a chance for reason to go beyond the understanding of the being of nature, up to its limits, in the (just as real) context of the ought-to-be: it allows it to go from the consideration of the idea as a hypothesis to the consideration of the idea as a task.

The consideration of the distinction and unity between being and ought-to-be is a fundamental character of critical idealism, one that, as we shall see, differentiates it from absolute and metaphysical idealism as well as from empiricist naturalism. Being and ought-to-be, in their distinction and connection, constitute the full meaning of the "fundamental law of truth."[15] Being and ought-to-be must appear in that order, because the method of logic – that is, of the pure foundation of being in thought – must also be the method of ethics, if the latter must be based on autonomous principles of reason and not on heteronomous principles of religion or politics. The same method of purity that grounds the validity of the knowledge of nature also founds the validity of practical knowledge and action. If one overturns the order of the connection between being and ought-to-be and believes to find in ethics the founding principle of the entire system, the inevitable consequence is the loss of the difference between logic and ethics, between being and ought-to-be, falling into what for Cohen is the philosophical error *par excellence*, which he calls sometimes naturalism, sometimes pantheism or philosophy of identity. In different forms and ways but with similar outcomes (from the standpoint of the system), this is the mistake made by those philosophers who took the path of what Cohen calls "romantic" Idealism: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Critical idealism never loses sight of the

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 103f.

[15] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1904, 1907[2]; the latter edition was reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bd. 7., 1981, p. 83.

principle of truth, which mainly consists of unsurpassed systematic difference between being and ought-to-be and in the methodological primacy of the logic of being compared to the ethics of the ought-to-be.

Plato recognizes in the idea – and not in phenomena – the true being that also founds the being of things and, beyond ideas, refers to a supreme and transcendent idea (the idea of good, of the ought-to-be) and posits it "*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβείᾳ κάι δυνάμει*;"[16] Kant recognizes "the grand disclosure brought to us through practical reason by means of the moral law, the disclosure, namely of an intelligible world through realization of the otherwise transcendent concept of freedom;"[17] in the same way, Cohen recognizes in the ethical idea an expansion of the meaning of pure thought as the origin of being into the meaning of pure thought as a task and an ought-to-be: "Since ethics has the task of teaching what ought-to-be – Cohen writes – then it must teach what *is not*. Its task is therefore to overcome the 'being' of experience, because beyond it there is no being to which our experiential concepts can refer – so it must go beyond experience. In practical philosophy the point is not therefore to posit the principles of what happens, but rather the laws of what ought to happen, *even if it never happens*."[18]

The ought-to-be as a widening of theoretical knowledge on the part of ethical knowledge, and the idea as a task as well as origin, are essential characters that differentiate Cohen's idealism from dogmatic idealism, making it effectively "critical."

The philosophical and systematic meaning of truth, though, is not exhausted by these two principles. It implies another important aspect: the full affirmation of the being of ought-to-be, finally implying the regulative idea of the system as the infinite task of unifying being and ought.

The importance that Cohen gives to the expression "being of ought-to-be,"[19] by which he underlines the objective a priori validity of the latter – different from that of the being of nature, but equally founded on the method of purity – sets the discourse on the idea as a task and shelters the ethical consideration of reality from any reduction to the weakness and fragility of utopism. The idea as ought-to-be is not founded on experience and yet we refer to it as a critical criteria and as its principle of validity. Cohen writes: "*Truth*, as we understand this fundamental idea of *critical idealism*, consists in the *distinction* of the *idea* as an infinite task for all moral ends both of human kind and of the single individual; in the distinction of this *ethical* meaning of the *idea* from any *existing reality* of *nature* and any *historical experience*. Both things are necessary: the distinction, but also the *preservation of both elements* in their equal logical value, just as existing reality maintains its value

[16] PLATO, *The Republic*, 509 b.

[17] I. KANT, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. V, p. 94; Eng. trans. M. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 79.

[18] H. COHEN, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, in Idem, *Werke*, cit., Bd. 2., Georg Olms, Hildesheim – New York 2001, p. 14. Kant's passage quoted by Cohen comes form the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 4., p. 427.

[19] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., p. 13 *passim*.

compared to the idea, and the idea only founds its meaning in the warning and guide by which it looks after existing reality. This truth of idealism, which at the same time honours the existing reality, ensures personal truthfulness in all our thinking, investigating and acting."[20]

The unity of being and ought-to-be, of logic and ethics – which cannot and must never be considered methodologically realized, on pain of loosing the fundamental methodological difference and of falling into the thought of identity – has to be regarded as the limit of thought, as a regulative idea necessary for the systematicity of thought in its proceeding. As we have seen above, the "fundamental law of truth" consists in the connection between logic and ethics; on the other hand, this connection can never be reduced to identity but is made up of a correlation between different things (in which logic gives ethics the method of pure foundation and, on the other hand, ethics retroactively widens knowledge and deepens the meaning of the idea as a task). For this reason, the systematic horizon of such a correlation – that is, of this connection between different fields, is the never-accomplished and yet true idea of the unity between logic and ethics. Cohen presents this idea, in his *Ethik des reinen Willens*, not as the identity but as the "harmonizing unity"[21] between nature and morality, towards which systematic thought proceeds and whose possibility is guaranteed in a regulative sense by the idea of God. As Cohen explains: "As for nature, the truth only requires that the logical foundations of natural knowledge remain unchanged, and that nature continues to exist by conforming to them. The truth requires this for logic, and not only because of logic, but also and especially for ethics. If they existed by themselves, logic and nature might as well disappear. But they have a relationship with ethics. Then the problem of truth appears, and becomes fundamental law. The idea of God represents this fundamental law. *God means that nature will continue to exist, with the same certainty as the eternity of ethics.* Not even the ideal is able to replace this certainty, which not even nature alone can provide. What is necessary is the method thanks to which these concepts, or rather these members of the system, are connected with one another."[22]

Therefore the idea of God – whose meaning in relation to faith Cohen develops and analyses in many texts devoted to religion – also enters his philosophical system, albeit only in the regulative meaning of the idea of the "transcendence of God:" as Cohen writes in the second volume of *System der Philosophie,* "God is therefore transcendent, both for nature and for ethicality. *But this transcendence only means that, thanks to it, nature is no longer transcendent with respect to ethicality, nor is ethicality such with respect to nature.*"[23]

I believe that the ethical dimension of thought is the sphere where Cohen's critical idealism – or any philosophy inspired by it – and postmodern thought can face each other. In fact, postmodern thinking radically rejects any thought of identity and

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[20] H. COHEN, *Vom ewigen Frieden*, in IDEM, *Kleinere Schriften V* , ed. by H. Wiedebach: H. COHEN, *Werke*, cit., Bd. 16., Georg Olms. Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1997, pp. 314f.

[21] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., pp. 462f.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 446.

[23] *Ibidem*.

representation, deeming such any rational thought, and seeks the possibility of an authentic thought of difference. But as we have seen, despite being a rigorous rationalism, critical idealism is not a thought of representation, but of judgment and of the idea, and it isn't even a thought of identity, because it doesn't consider the idea as the dogmatically assumed unity to which to reduce all difference. Rather, it considers the idea as the inchoate unity of hypothesis and method - not as founding, but as infinite foundation - and of the task, not as a rationalization and justification of reality, but as a never-ending process of criticism of the what exists and construction of the ought. Underlying this different evaluation of rational thought, in my opinion, there is a different ethical presupposition – or, in Kant's terms, a different practical interest, which must be made explicit.

Developing his postmodern thought as a form of anti-Platonism, Gilles Deleuze denounces the general character of Plato's thought, for which "everything culminates in the great principle: that there is – before all else, and despite everything – an affinity or a filiation – or perhaps it should be called a *phili*ation – of thought with the true; in short, a good nature and a good desire, grounded in the last instance upon the form of analogy in the Good."[24] This fundamental attitude of Platonic thought, according to Deleuze, is not a thesis deriving from his reflection, but rather an implicit and subjective assumption, which moves and directs his thought, like all philosophy after Plato. This assumption consists of the "good will on the part of the thinker" and the "up right nature on the part of thought."[25] For Deleuze, this "good will" and this trust in thought – that is, in its affinity to truth – is constitutive of philosophy and inevitably leads it to propose itself as "orthodoxy," that is, a rationalization and justification of common sense and constitutive values, thus revealing its constitutively conservative and reactionary nature as well as its totalitarian power to annihilate difference in identity.[26]

First of all, it is important to contest this inseparable link placed by post-modern thought between the "good will" of philosophy and its alleged conservative and reactionary orthodoxy. Cohen's critical idealism is a significant example of how philosophy, precisely because it is driven by the "good will" of the search for truth – as a methodical foundation and as a realization of its infinite task – is not at all reduced to a reactionary orthodoxy but, on the contrary, fully develops the potentialities of a thought critical of reality and open to the wealth of differences in its never-ending search.

Secondly, it is necessary to recognize a wholly different motive at the basis of the postmodern criticism of rational thought and its "good will," a motive that is supposed in a way that is just as (or perhaps even more) unquestioned: the primacy, or perhaps rather the absolute role, given to the drives and the will to power. If the reflection of postmodern thinkers gave rise to a very precise and generally sharable analysis of the current cultural situation, it has, however, also expressed programs

[24] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1968, p. 185; Eng. trans. P. Patton, The Athlone Press, London 1994, p. 124.

[25] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 171; Eng. trans. cit., p. 131.

[26] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 175ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 134ff.

and projects of emancipation from this situation, which are not necessarily the only possible ones, but depend on particular perspectives and options. Deleuze's proposal, like that of many others, is strongly marked by a realized Nietzscheism. The differences for which to produce a liberated space in which they can flow freely are energetic impulses lacking a subject and a purpose: nomadic and anarchist expressions of the will to power. So the thought that has to interpret them cannot be completely irrational and paradoxical, that is, as Deleuze says, it must be "misosophy"[27] driven by "ill will."[28]

Critical idealism, instead, while not being at all a thought of identity and representation – and rather seeing thought of identity as the fundamental philosophical mistake and thought as representation as the reductive character of empiricism and psychologism – and while building precisely on the value of differences the richness of its systematic nature and its infinitely open ethical perspective, it is certainly and consciously moved by the "good will" of the search for a harmonious connection with the truth. The differences, which the rationalistic and critical thinking recognizes and safeguards, are not energy flows of drives, but multiple aspects of meaning; the task of thought and action is not, as in the Nietzschean perspective, power of affirmation of desire, but possibility of realization of the idea.

In conclusion, I am convinced that many of the characters of Cohen's thought not only circumvent the criticism that hit other forms of idealism and made them outdated, but also make it interesting as a reference and inspiration for a project-like reflection, one that is able to carry out the original developments necessary and appropriate to propose even today, in a valid and credible way, the great themes that inspired critical idealism.

[27] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 182; Eng. trans. cit., p. 227.

[28] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 171; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

Cadenza 4
The Nature of Non-Representational Thought

In *L'image de la pensée*, the interesting third chapter of *Différence et répétition*, Gilles Deleuze discusses the issue of the presuppositions of philosophical thought. He denounces the fact that, however much philosophy has tried to avoid objective presuppositions, that is, the "concepts explicitly presupposed by a given concept,"[1] it has not been able to do without "subjective or implicit presuppositions contained in feelings rather than concepts."[2] Such sentiments presupposed in all of philosophical thought – which, as a result, is always dogmatic and orthodox – are the right nature and good will of thought and ultimately converge in common sense: "This element consists only of the supposition that thought is the natural exercise of a faculty, of the presupposition that there is a natural capacity for thought endowed with a talent for truth or an affinity with the true, under the double aspect of a good will on the part of the thinker and an up right nature on the part of thought."[3] This determines, according to him, the constitutively representational character of thought, due to which it is unable to think *difference*: "In this sense, conceptual philosophical thought has as its implicit presupposition a pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from the pure element of common sense. According to this image, thought has an affinity with the true; it formally possesses the true and materially wants the true. It is in terms of this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think. Thereafter it matters little whether philosophy begins with the object or the subject, with Being or with beings, as long as thought remains subject to this Image which already prejudges everything: the distribution of the object and the subject as well as that of Being and beings."[4]

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[1] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1968, p. 169; Eng. trans. P. Patton, The Athlone Press, London 1994, p. 129.

[2] *Ibidem*. The English translation has been modified, "feelings" substituting "opinions."

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 171; Eng. trans. cit., p. 131.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 172; Eng. trans. cit., p. 131.

A. Poma, *Cadenzas*, Studies in German Idealism 18,
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According to Deleuze, to withdraw itself from identity and from representation, thought must criticize and destroy subjective presuppositions (the "postulates") of representational thought and to undertake the road toward "misosophy"[5] and "ill will,"[6] to generate itself in itself[7]: "As a result, the conditions of a philosophy which would be without any kind of presuppositions appear all the more clearly: instead of being supported by the moral Image of thought, it would take as its point of departure a radical critique of this Image and the 'postulates' it implies. It would find its difference or its true beginning, not in an agreement with the pre-philosophical Image, but in a rigorous struggle against this Image, which it would denounce as non-philosophical. As a result, it would discover its authentic repetition in a thought without Image, even at the cost of the greatest destructions and the greatest demoralisations, and a philosophical obstinacy with no ally but paradox, one which would have to renounce both the form of representation and the element of common sense. As though thought could begin to think, and continually begin again, only when liberated from the Image and its postulates. It is futile to claim to reformulate the doctrine of truth without first taking stock of the postulates which project this distorting image of thought."[8]

Deleuze elaborates the characteristics of this new form of thought – of *difference* – starting from an interpretation of the notable passage from Plato's *Republic* in which Socrates speaks of sensible objects that "*force* us to think."[9] Thought, according to Deleuze, is generated by an encounter with a contingent impulse, one that exercises an originary, powerful, coactive, and ultimately necessary violence: "In fact, concepts only ever designate possibilities. They lack the claws of absolute necessity – in other words, of an original violence inflicted upon thought; the claws of a strangeness or an enmity which alone would awaken thought from its natural stupor or eternal possibility: there is only involuntary thought, aroused but constrained within thought, and all the more absolutely necessary for being born, illegitimately, of fortuitousness in the world. Thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy, and nothing presupposes philosophy: everything begins with misosophy. Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think. The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself."[10]

In such thought, each faculty, loosing itself from "common sense," that is, from the common exercise of the faculties in the recognition of the identity of the object, unfolds itself in a "transcendent exercise," through which it captures in a paradoxical

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 182; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

[6] *Ibid.,* p. 171; Eng. trans. cit., p. 130.

[7] Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 191f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 146ff.

[8] *Ibid.,* pp. 172f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 132.

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 181; Eng. trans. cit., p. 138. Deleuze refers here to Plato's *Republic*, 523b and ff.

[10] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 181f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

way "that in the world which concerns it exclusively and brings it into the world;"[11] the insensibility of sensibility, the immemorial of memory, the unthinkable of thought,[12] the unimaginable of imagination, the silence of language and perhaps several other transcendent objects of other, as-yet undiscovered faculties.[13] In this way, according to Deleuze, thought, free from the presupposition of common sense, frees itself from representation and expands in all its potentialities as the thought of *difference*: "The violence of that which forces thought develops from the *sentiendum* to the *cogitandum*. Each faculty is unhinged, but what are the hinges if not the form of a common sense which causes all the faculties to function and converge? Each one, in its own order and on its own account, has broken the form of common sense which kept it within the empirical element of *doxa*, in order to attain both its 'nth' power and the paradoxical element within transcendental exercise. Rather than all the faculties converging and contributing to a common project of recognising an object, we see divergent projects in which, with regard to what concerns it essentially, each faculty is in the presence of that which is its 'own.' Discord of the faculties, chain of force and fuse along which each confronts its limit, receiving from (or communicating to) the other only a violence which brings it face to face with its own element, as though with its disappearance or its perfection."[14]

I have argued elsewhere that Deleuze's conception represents an impulsive, energetic and irrational perspective of thought, one that is of absolutely Nietzschean origin and has mystical results. I have even tried to show that critical idealism, in particular in the form that it took in the thought of Hermann Cohen, though it remains altogether rationalistic, escapes from the model of thought as identity and representation (the kind Deleuze condemns throughout the whole of the philosophical tradition) and is instead authentically capable of thinking difference.[15] It is not my intention here to return to what I have already argued elsewhere. I would instead like to elaborate on these interesting reflections of Deleuze's in order to pose the question of the presuppositions of philosophical thought, of that which Kant called the "nature of reason."[16] I do not intend here to address the problem of thought without presuppositions, which doesn't seem to me relevant, if not for a philosophy that intends to propose itself, as is the case with Hegel, as an absolute system of thought and of reality. I would instead like to propose a reflection on the rational (or not) character of thought's presuppositions. It seems to me, in fact, that this could be a quite relevant question. Given that rational thought issues from presuppositions, these have to be rational in their own right, otherwise it would seem that they would

[11] *Ibid.,* p. 186; Eng. trans. cit., p. 143.

[12] Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 182ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 139ff.

[13] Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 186f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 143f.

[14] *Ibid.,* p. 184; Eng. trans. cit., p. 141.

[15] Cf. A. POMA, *Yearning for Form: Hermann Cohen in Postmodernism*, in IDEM, *Yearning for Form and Other Essays on Hermann Cohen's Thought*, Springer, Dordrecht 2006, p. 339.

[16] I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 3., pp. 825f. *passim*; Eng. trans. N. Kemp Smith, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2003[3], p. 630 *passim*.

impinge upon the rational rigor of thought itself. But how can rational thought presuppose something that is in its own right rational?

In fact, as I have written elsewhere,[17] to my mind, even Deleuze's thought of difference is not altogether free from presuppositions. He, however, claims the opposite. The thought of difference, Deleuze believes, cuts any and all ties with the presuppositions of a natural, pre-philosophical thought and of a natural goodwill oriented toward the true and the good. Thought of difference cannot repose "not disturbed"[18] in the consoling security of a "claimed affinity with the true, that *philia* which predetermines at once both the image of thought and the concept of philosophy;"[19] it is thus the exercise of "someone who neither allows himself to be represented nor wishes to represent anything. Not an individual endowed with good will and a natural capacity for thought, but an individual full of ill will who does not manage to think, either naturally or conceptually."[20] This description, however, allows one to conclude that this new thought of difference does not require subjective presuppositions of traditional thought, but not that it does not assume any presupposition at all. In truth, it seems like thought of difference, as Deleuze describes it, has a presupposition, and a rather evident one at that: it is, in fact, originated by the "claws"[21] of a "fundamental *encounter*"[22] that violently forces one to think and, thus, generates thought. Quoting Artaud and agreeing with him, Deleuze writes that "to manage to think something" is "the only conceivable 'work'" and that it "*presupposes* an impulse, a compulsion to think which passes through all sorts of bifurcations, spreading from the nerves and being communicated to the soul in order to arrive at thought."[23] If Deleuze holds that thought of difference, regardless of its contingent origin in a kind of necessitating impulse, is void of presuppositions, this depends, I believe, on the fact that such thought is not different from the impulse that provokes it. Thought itself is, in fact, for Deleuze, an energetic flux, a sensible "vitality:"[24] "it is true – Deleuze writes – that on the path which leads to that which is to be thought, all begins with sensibility."[25] If, then, thought is generated in a sensible impulse, this is nonetheless not a presupposition for it, insofar as it is already thought in the moment of its being generated, the "genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself."[26]

Thus, if one wishes to recognize and justify the nature of rational thought, a presupposition that nonetheless does not challenge the foundation of thinking by way

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[17] A. POMA, *Yearning for Form: Hermann Cohen in Postmodernism*, in IDEM, *Yearning for Form and Other Essays on Hermann Cohen's Thought*, cit., pp. 313ff.

[18] Cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 181; Eng. trans. cit., p. 138.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 181; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 171; Eng. trans. cit., p. 130.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 181; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 182; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

[23] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 191f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 147 (my italics).

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 187; Eng. trans. cit., p. 143.

[25] *Ibid.,* p. 188; Eng. trans. cit., p. 144.

[26] *Ibid.,* p. 182; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

of concepts, one will have to be able to recognize an originary condition that participates all the same in the rationality that it is destined to produce and for which it serves as an orientation. We encounter very important outlines of such a presupposition in the analysis Kant offers of the "need for reason" in his 1786 text *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*

In this brief text, as is known, Kant takes up a position with respect to *Spinozismusstreit*, on which Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi had once opposed Moses Mendelssohn. From Kant's argumentations, what issues is a substantial recognition of Mendelssohn's merit in defending the rational character of philosophical thought, though limited by the rejection of the demonstrative validity of his argument on the existence of God. The central theme of both of Kant's judgments is the recourse to "common sense," "healthy reason," or "plain understanding" to which Mendelssohn made recourse in order to "orientate oneself in the speculative use of reason."[27] Mendelssohn, Kant believes, "still deserves credit for having insisted that the ultimate touchstone of the reliability of a judgement, in this case as in all other cases, is to be found *in reason alone*, whether the latter is guided by insight in its choice of propositions or merely by need and by the maxim of its own."[28] Mendelssohn's error, according to Kant, consists instead in having exchanged this subjective presupposition of reason with an assumed and unfounded objective capacity for knowing, confusing in this way an important maxim to orient oneself in thinking with a founding, objective principle of knowing. Kant writes that "it was not by *knowledge* but by a felt *need* of reason that *Mendelssohn* (unwittingly) orientated himself in speculative thought. Such guidance is provided not by an objective principle of reason – i.e. a principle based on insight – but by a purely subjective principle (or maxim) of the only use of reason which the limits of reason itself allow – i.e. a principle based on need. It is this principle which, *alone* and *in itself*, constitutes the sole determinant of our judgement concerning the existence of the supreme being, and its use as a means of orientation in attempts of speculate on this same subject is purely contingent. Thus, Mendelssohn was certainly mistaken in believing that such speculation was nevertheless capable, alone and in itself, of settling all these questions by means of demonstration."[29]

This error forced Mendelssohn into the old way of dogmatic metaphysical philosophy. Thus, as Kant writes in a letter to Christian Gottfried Schütz at the end of November 1785, Mendelssohn's last work – the *Morgenstuden* – constitutes the

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[27] I. KANT, *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 8., p. 133; Eng. trans. H. B. Nisbet, in *Kant. Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-New York-Port Chester-Melbourne-Sidney 1991[2], p. 237.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 140; Eng. trans. cit., p. 243.

[29] *Ibid.,* pp. 139f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 243. I do not discuss in depth here the issue between Kant and Mendelssohn, which is analyzed by Reinier Munk, in his contribution *Mendelssohn and Kant on the Bond of Reason and Reason's Needs*, presented at the Congress on "Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics," Amsterdam, 7–10 December 2009, now published as: *'What is the tie?' The discussion of Mendelssohn and Kant 1785-1787*, in AA.VV., *Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, ed. By Reinier Munk, Springer, New York-Heidelberg-Dordrecht 2011, pp. 183-202.

"last trace of a dogmatizing metaphysics," "a monument," "an immortal model on which to test one's own principles to then confirm or reject them."[30] Mendelssohn's achievement is a great one, but all the same it is a monument to the past of philosophy, one that the new critical thought honours yet overcomes and, ultimately, abandons.

The points, then, on which Kant's judgment and reflection are centred are essentially two-fold: the rational character of the subjective presupposition on which reason orients itself (one reason Kant appreciates and praises Mendelssohn) and his uniquely orientative and regulative character, not constitutive of objective knowledge, and on the latter point Kant separates himself from Mendelssohn and criticizes him, insofar as, not having upheld this distinction, he has remained tied to a dogmatic form of philosophy and has not reached the foundedness of critical philosophy. That dogmatic character, which Deleuze laments in all of past philosophy that takes itself to issue from common sense, is, for Kant, proper only to a philosophy that is not aware of the character of its subjective presupposition and thus the uniquely orientative value of it.

But what does Kant mean by this "common sense" or "healthy reason?" In the text that we are considering, he accepts these expressions of Mendelssohn's and, it should be said, himself uses them in other works. But it is easy to note that, over the course of the essay, he busies himself with the task of making rigorous and precise the sense in which these notions are acceptable and to distinguish it from the ways in which they instead lead to error and to confusion. It is exactly the ambiguity of these expressions, in fact, that gives room to Jacobi's position and those who polemicized with Mendelssohn. The question, then, is whether the need for common reason is in and of itself rational or not, given that, in the latter case, reason would hold itself accountable to that which comes to it arbitrarily, suggested by revelation or from some imprecise inspiration, as results precisely from the position of Jacobi and his acolytes: "even ordinary healthy reason, given the ambiguous position to which he [Mendelssohn] relegated the use of this faculty [the common sense] in contrast to speculation, would risk becoming the basic principle of zealotry and of the complete subversion of reason."[31] It could be said that the whole text is, thus, a brief investigation aimed at precisely this specification.

At first, Kant redefines this notion, describing it as "the feeling of a *need* which is inherent in reason itself."[32] This expression, which, contrary to the others indicated above, abandons any and all reference to the consensus of common opinion, brings closer two fundamental characteristics: on the one hand, it has to do with a *need*, thus of a sentiment that tends toward its own satisfaction; on the other hand, it has to do with a need *of reason*, in light of which, then, rational thought is neither influenced nor determined by anything other than itself. A "need," according to the common definition, shared by Kant, too, is without a doubt a sentiment, not a concept, and configures itself as a tension between lack and satisfaction. Kant

[30] I. KANT, *Briefwechsel*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 10., pp. 428f.

[31] I. KANT, *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*, cit., pp. 133f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 237f.

[32] *Ibid.,* p. 136; Eng. trans. cit., p. 240.

nonetheless specifies that, in the case of the need of reason, does not have to do with pathological sentiment, of a sensible inclination, but of a sentiment of reason. With a similar form of argumentation to what he would use a little later in 1788, in his *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, for the "moral sentiment," he specifies that "reason does not feel. It perceives its own deficiency and produces a feeling of need through the *cognitive impulse*. The same applies in this case as in the case of moral feeling, which is not the source of moral law, for this is entirely the product of reason; on the contrary, moral feeling is itself produced or occasioned by moral laws and hence by reason, because the active and yet free will needs specific grounds [on which to act]."[33] It has to do, then, with a need "which is inherent in reason itself," "which reason imposes on itself,"[34] thus of pure reason, insofar as, following its maxim, reason "always looks primarily to its own interest."[35] This means that, in following such a need, reason is not moved by the representation of any sensible motive, but only by itself. The need of reason is thus a priori.

With these clarifications, Kant makes important strides toward the delineation and definition of an acceptable meaning of the notion of "common sense." Upon completing this clarification process, Kant proposes an expression that is, for him, more accurate in indicating the subjective condition of rational and critical thinking: "But the expression '*a pronouncement of healthy reason*' still remains ambiguous in the present context, for it can be taken to mean either a judgment based on *rational insight* (as in Mendelssohn's own misunderstanding) or a judgment based on *rational inspiration* (as the author of the *Resultate* appears to think). Therefore it will be necessary to give this source of judgment another name, and none is more appropriate than '*rational belief*.'"[36]

Kant's position is therefore a third way, different from both warring theses. On the one hand, in fact, the subjective condition of rational thought does not have a constitutive value of knowledge; on the other hand, it is not the result of an unfathomable inspiration or revelation. What distances the need of reason, however subjective, from any conflation with illusion and fantasy is the necessary relationship that it has with objective knowledge. Kant writes: "But if it has been established in advance that no intuition of the object is possible here, and that it is not even possible to find something of a similar kind which might enable us to provide our extended concepts [of the object in question] with a representation appropriate to them and hence also with a guarantee of their own real possibility, only two further steps remain to be taken. Firstly, we must carefully examine whether the concept with which we wish to venture beyond all possible experience is itself free from contradiction; and secondly, there we must reduce at least the *relationship* between the object in question and the objects of experience to pure concepts of the understanding. In so doing, certainly we do not turn the object into an object of the senses; but we do at least think of something which is itself supra-sensory as capable of

[33] *Ibid.,* pp. 139f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 243.

[34] *Ibid.,* p. 136; Eng. trans. cit., p. 240.

[35] *Ibid.,* p. 140; Eng. trans. cit., p. 243.

[36] *Ibid.,* p. 140 ; Eng. trans. cit., p. 244.

being applied by our reason to the world of experience. Without these precautions, we would be unable to make any use whatsoever of such a concept, and would indulge in fantasy instead of thinking."[37]

This clarification is essential, not only because it marks the insurmountable difference between the subjective condition of reason and any form of mystical, fantastical Enlightening, but also because it allows to state the rational legitimacy of that assumption. Kant uses the interesting expression: "*the right of the need* of reason" for "*orientating* ourselves in thought."[38] Deleuze also stresses that the possibility of thinking is not a question of fact but of principle. Referring to the attempt of Artaud to generate the thought in his own native ability, Deleuze points out: "The difficulties he describes himself as experiencing therefore must be understood as not merely in fact but as difficulties in principle, concerning and affecting the essence of what it means to think. Artaud said that the problem (for him) was not oriented to his thought, or to perfect the expression of what he thought, or to acquire application and method or to perfect his poems, but simply to manage to think something."[39] The principle mentioned by Deleuze, however, coincides with the fact; since thought is a flow of energy, the principle is nothing but the power with which this flow is able to establish itself. The "right of the need of reason" mentioned by Kant, however, is the legitimacy to assume, even if only subjectively, an idea, without which what is known objectively, justifiably, would not be explained: "we are still, despite our lake of insight, subjectively justified in *assuming* that this is so because reason *needs* to make this assumption. That is, in order to explain the phenomenon in question, reason needs to presuppose something which it can understand; for nothing else to which it can attach a concept is able to remedy this need."[40]

Rational faith, then, for its double difference—from a presumed objective knowledge as from a presumed transcendent inspiration—is characterized, on one hand, from the impossibility of being transformed into "knowledge" [*Wissen*] ("a purely *rational belief* can never be transformed into *knowledge* [*Wissen*] by any natural data of reason and experience")[41] and, on the other, from the legitimacy and rational certainty that is not inferior from that of true knowledge ("this conviction of truth is not inferior in degree to knowledge (...), even if it is totally different from it in kind").[42]

At the conclusion of this explanation, Kant formulates what is his definitive position: "Thus, a purely rational belief is the signpost or compass by means of which the speculative thinker can orientate himself on his rational wanderings in the field of supra-sensory objects, while the man of ordinary but (morally) healthy reason

[37] *Ibid.,* pp. 136f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 240.

[38] *Ibid.,* p. 137, Eng. trans. cit. pp. 240f.

[39] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 191; Eng. trans. cit., p. 147.

[40] I. KANT, *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*, cit., p. 139; Eng. trans. cit., p. 242.

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 141; Eng. trans. cit., p. 244.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 141; Eng. trans. cit., p. 245.

can use it to plan his course, for both theoretical and practical purposes, in complete conformity with the whole end of his destiny."[43]

On this amended definition, "ordinary but (morally) healthy reason," one which, for Kant, is equivalent to "rational faith," it seems to me opportune to linger a bit longer. As we see, this expression has, for Kant, an altogether different meaning from the quite trivial "*everybody knows, no one can deny*" that Deleuze attributes to it.[44]

The specification that "ordinary reason" is acceptable only if "(morally) healthy" obviously does not mean the exclusion of a "sick" reason and does not concern the question of madness, but rather means that even ordinary reason has to be well-founded and that such a foundation originates in its practical interest, not in its speculative one. Kant explains that the subjective maxim dictated by the need of reason is from a speculative point of view only an unnecessary "assumption,"[45] while from the practical point of view it is a necessary premise, that is, a "postulate of reason"[46] – "Much more important, however, is the need of reason in its practical use, because this is unconditional, and because we are compelled to assume that God exists not only if we *wish* to pass judgement, but because we *must pass judgement*."[47]

In the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Kant comments on the objection raised by Thomas Wizenmann in his response to Kant's essay of 1786: "In the *Deutsches Museum*, February 1787, there is a treatise by a very subtle and clearheaded man, the late Wizenmann, whose early death is to be lamented, in which he disputes the authorization to conclude from a need to the objective reality of its object and illustrates the point by the example of a *man in love*, who, having fooled himself into an idea of beauty that is merely a chimera of his own brain, would like to conclude that such an object really exists somewhere. I grant that he is perfectly correct in this, in all cases where the need is based upon *inclination*, which cannot necessarily postulate the existence of its object even for the one affected by it, much less can it contain a requirement valid for everyone, and therefore it is a *merely subjective* ground of the wish. But in the present case it is a *need of reason* arising from an *objective* determining ground of the will, namely the moral law, which necessarily binds every rational being and therefore justifies [*berechtigt*] him a priori in presupposing in nature the conditions befitting it and makes the latter inseparable from the complete practical use of reason."[48] As we can see, the "right of the need of reason" is that which distinguishes the subjective maxim (which is objectively founded) with which reason orients thoughts, from the impulse (which is only subjective and, thus, irrational and fantastical) due to which reason deviates from its more rigorous direc-

[43] *Ibid.,* p. 142; Eng. trans. cit., p. 245.

[44] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., p. 170; Eng. trans. cit., p. 130.

[45] I. KANT, *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*, cit., p. 139; Eng. trans. cit., p. 242.

[46] *Ibid.,* p. 141; Eng. trans. cit., p. 245.

[47] *Ibid.,* p. 139; Eng. trans. cit., p. 242.

[48] I. KANT, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. V, pp. 143f.; Eng. trans. M. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 119.

tion. Such a right is provided by practical interest. This is, finally, the meaning of the Kantian affirmation of the "primacy of pure practical reason in its connection with speculative reason."[49] The "need of reason," then, is that which, imposing itself for the unabandonable practical interest in reason itself, orients not only practical reason, but also the entire systematic and critical thought, giving it a regulative order toward the idea of the intelligible and unconditional. This and only this is the "common sense" that can and should be accepted as a legitimate, rational premise for thought itself.

Now, you might ask, what is left of this Kantian problem in Hermann Cohen's philosophy? I think one can answer that a great deal is left, and that the issue is further elaborated by Cohen with original and interesting results, which are anything but secondary to the whole of his thought.

Nothing significant in this regard, however, can be found in Cohen's commentary on the Kantian theory of practical postulates, which one might guess would be a privileged place for a reflection of this sort. In the chapter of *Kants Begründung der Ethik* dedicated to the highest good and to the postulates, Cohen elaborates a rather reductive discourse, corresponding to his thesis that in such a doctrine Kant made an incoherent concession to eudaimonism as well as to a dangerous connection with the pure ethics of religion.[50] In this work, Cohen clearly opts for the outcome of ethics in the historic and political ideal of the kingdom of ends, to the detriment of the individual doctrine of the highest good,[51] and consequently negates the validity of the doctrine of practical postulates.

It has to be underlined, though, that Cohen specifies that the idea of freedom, for Kant, is not a postulate, as it would appear from certain passages, especially in the *Dialektik der reinen praktischen Vernunft*. Cohen notes that this concept, he writes, "never before is said to be a postulate."[52] Nonetheless the idea of freedom is par excellence the idea of the unconditional, which constitutes, even for Kant, the object of the need of reason. One should not, in fact, reduce the Kantian discourse to the question of the existence of God. If he, in the text on *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*, concentrates his discourse on the idea of God, this is only due to the contingent occasion of the essay, that is, the position taken with respect to the debate between Mendelssohn and Jacobi, which points precisely to this argument, and to the fact that Mendelssohn directs his reflections on common sense precisely to the question of the existence of God. Nonetheless, Kant clearly affirms that the need of reason arises in reference to the idea of the unconditional. In that text, he writes: "for not only does our reason itself feel a need to make the *concept* of the unlimited the basis of the concept of everything limited – and hence of all other things; this need in fact also extends to the assumption that the unlimited *exists*, for without this

[49] *Ibid.,* p. 119; Eng. trans. cit., p. 100.

[50] Cf. H. COHEN, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, in IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Band 2, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 2001, pp. 359f.

[51] Cf. *ibid.,* p. 352.

[52] *Ibid.,* p. 357.

assumption, our reason can find no satisfactory basis for the contingent existence of worldly things, let alone for the purposiveness and order which are evident to such a remarkable degree in everything."[53] Further, in his prudent letter to Jacobi on August 30th, 1789, Kant makes explicit reference to the idea of freedom as the "compass of reason" – "I do not think that in this case you consider the compass of reason useless or even misleading. Something that is added by means of speculation, but which is only in reason itself and which we are able to name (with the term 'freedom,' a supersensible faculty of causality in us), but not to grasp, is the necessary completion of the speculation itself."[54]

If we follow Cohen's considerations on the unconditional in Kant, we find many elements that are interesting with respect to our topic. With respect to transcendental ideas as syllogistic principles (*Prinzipien*), Cohen writes that it has to do with, he says, "anticipations,"[55] of "concepts which determine the unquenchable interest in metaphysics,"[56] whose "critical-cognitive meaning" consists "in defining *the thing itself*, in explaining its need,"[57] given that "we require more extensive syntheses"[58] of those of judgments through the concepts of the intellect. But especially, discussing the position of John Stuart Mill, he overturns the criticism according to which the idea as syllogistic principle is a *petitio principii* in the positive affirmation that it is undoubtedly a "*petitio*," an "aspiration of reason,"[59] in which the meaning of the syllogism itself resides as the task of a higher synthesis: "That *major* expressed a miserable tautology (...) will be apparent to all, but the fact that 'all' is a 'petition' that guides and generates the entire rational procedure of the syllogism, the fact that a principle speaks in the major premise, herein lies the strength of the syllogism, its incorruptible meaning in the apparatus of knowledge and the history of thought. The petition contained in the major premise *is the principle*; for this, and in this sense the syllogistic is free from a *petitio principii* (...). As the different explanations of the thing itself, even the syllogism has no other purpose than to guard against 'the abyss of intelligible contingency.'"[60]

Cohen uses the expression "abyss of intelligible contingency" not only with reference to the idea of God, but in reference to all the ideas and, specifically, the idea of freedom, in the conviction of a primacy of the idea of freedom, as unity and recapitulation of all ideas. He writes: "As in Plato, with a wisdom that still requires a more thorough consideration, the doctrine of ideas leads to the idea of good, so in critical idealism categories flow into ideas; and, joining all together (...) in the idea of freedom, they raise the milestone of experience *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*, and build on the abyss of intelligible contingency, next to the realm of being, a realm in which

[53] I. KANT, *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*, cit., pp. 137f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 241.

[54] I. KANT, *Briefwechsel*, cit., Bd. XI, p. 76.

[55] H. COHEN, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, cit., p. 66.

[56] *Ibid.,* p. 68.

[57] Cf. *ibid.,* p. 72.

[58] *Ibid.,* p. 74.

[59] *Ibid.,* p. 81.

[60] *Ibid.,* pp. 79f.

what is real is what *ought*-to-be, even if it is not, and even if – as the wise of experience think – it will never be: a kingdom of the ought-to-be."[61]

In the chapter on the "primacy of practical reason" Cohen develops an articulate criticism of the "morbid conception of primacy"[62] of Fichte. Fichte's dangerous error in this regard consists, according to Cohen, in having transformed the primacy of practical reason in a conception of freedom as "supreme instance"[63] from which to deduce any and all knowledge, even theoretical knowledge. Thus, Cohen writes, "so we got to the point where philosophy ends and biography begins."[64] That which, for Kant, is the primacy of practical interest in orienting systematic knowing becomes, in Fichte, the absolute character of practical sentiment, on which to found and from which to deduce the entire system of knowledge. Regarding this overturning of the critical perspective that Fichte undertakes, Cohen writes: "The criterion of certainty lies no longer in concepts and laws, but only in feeling. And therefore this feeling is, also for objects, what subjectively means as a psychological function: self-certainty of practical truth.

Practical truth is, at the same time, the foundation of all theoretical correctness. Ethics must not be based on the doctrine of experience, it is not in it that finds its norm; the criterion of all truth is rather the practical sentiment."[65]

What Cohen denounces and separates his own conception from is something quite similar to what Kant, in his text *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*, condemned as being Mendelssohn's dogmatism. This poses an important limit to our own reflections on the theme of the need of reason in Cohen's thought because, in the heat of investigation, we should take care not to fall in the error of losing sight of Cohen's definite proposal to not abandon the rigorous rational foundation of the system of knowledge and philosophical thought.

Cohen recognizes the correct meaning of the primacy of practical reason in the regulative meaning of ideas and, in particular, the idea of freedom. Such meaning answers to the "irresistible" "drive to extension"[66] of research and rational knowledge. By satisfying this impulse, however, they "do not become transcendent objects,"[67] but are rules of reason insofar as they are and remain *problems* of reason.[68] Only with these conditions in place can the rational significance of ideas be maintained, only then can one refrain from feeling diffidence toward their regulative use, "as if – writes Cohen – it wasn't the very knowledge of experience at its limits that makes constitutive concepts problematic ideas; as if, in the necessary and

[61] *Ibid.,* p. 133.
[62] *Ibid.,* p. 296.
[63] *Ibid.,* p. 292.
[64] *Ibid.,* p. 291.
[65] *Ibid.,* pp. 291f.
[66] Cf. *ibid.,* p. 228.
[67] *Ibidem*.
[68] Cf. *ibid.,* p. 229.

homogeneous delimitation of experience itself, the laws did not expand to being maxims, driven by the need, by the problem of the unconditional."[69]

The whole of these issues reappears in a central nerve of Cohen's system, that is the start of *Ethik des reinen Willens*, wherein Cohen is theorizing the positioning of ethics within the system of philosophy and its connection with logic. It is to this place, that is, the first chapter of the *Ethik des reinen Willens* dedicated to *Das Grundgesetz der Wahrheit*, to which we must now turn.

The fundamental law of truth, as the supreme law of the system, is for Cohen the systematic relationship between logic and ethics. In such a relationship there is a priority of logic over ethics, since the method of purity is the method of logic and from this it passes to ethics, and not vice versa. If ethics did not adhere to the method of logic, for which "the foundations are founding,"[70] it would lose the value of rational knowledge. Nonetheless, Cohen recognizes that even a "retroactive effect"[71] of ethics over logic; only for the latter does the method of purity reach the fullness of the method of truth and does the system of knowledge reach the completeness of the system of truth. Truth is not in logic, nor is it in ethics, but rather in the systematic unity of the two and the instance, not to say the possibility, of this unity is proposed by ethics: "Let us seek this method – writes Cohen – primarily as a method that combines and joins ethics with logic. This is required by the fundamental law of truth. It is not simply a matter of transferring to ethics the method that proved fruitful in logic, to see if it is also such in ethics; rather, ethics refers to the competences logic to the extent that it *presupposes* and requires the unity of method for both the interests of reason. The fundamental law of truth realizes this *presupposition*. We have here not a transfer forward, but a retroactive effect. It is a new light that the principle of truth spreads on the fundamental method of logic showing how it is logic itself that demands ethics."[72]

Ethics thus brings to the method of purity the "presupposition" of truth, which means "connection and coincidence of the theoretical problem and the ethical problem."[73] This does not mean that the logical method of purity, the method of knowledge, is not by itself only capable of leading to true results, but rather that such a method is set into motion by and oriented toward the "demands of truth,"[74] that reason presupposes and, only in ethics, can fully formulate for the entire system. The logical meaning of "principle" (*Prinzip*) as "petition" reaches in ethics its fullness as a "demand of truth." Cohen writes: "The highest and most all-encompassing expressions with which logic indicates the value of knowledge are always *universality* and *necessity*. We know now what their methodological value amounts to: they do not indicate the final results, the final strong points of knowledge,

[69] *Ibid.,* p. 258.

[70] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. 2.Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Band 7, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim – New York 1981, p. 85.

[71] *Ibid.,* p. 90.

[72] *Ibidem*. My italics.

[73] *Ibid.,* p. 89.

[74] *Ibid.,* p. 86.

but rather tend to pave new ways for scientific research. *They do not have the value of axioms and principles; they can act instead as major premises of the syllogistic demonstration process*. With what different expressions could one otherwise indicate the intrinsic cohesion and most general characteristic of the value of knowledge? As general foundations what is left are the ways of judgment and the categories.

Logic finds itself in a comically awkward position if it is to define – the *truth*. The comic element arises from the situation in which, through this problem, logic finds itself. Logic has to do with exactness. And its final milestone is purity. *Within the realm logic, the meaning of truth is satisfied by purity.* But in general, where does the need of truth come from, in the language of reason?"[75]

Cohen explains that this presupposition of the "connection and coincidence of the theoretical problem and the ethical problem" with the "example"[76] of the common application of the "fundamental law of continuity"[77] in logic and in ethics. In reality it is much more than an example, it has to do with the "decisive point"[78] of this coincidence. As the independence of logic from psychology is founded on the diversity of thought from representation, so, too, is the independence of ethics from psychology founded on the difference between will and impulse. Such a fundamental difference characterizes the "unity of action" through the "fundamental law of continuity." Cohen writes: "The will has a set, an incalculable multiplicity of elements and initial pressures, which appear due to impulsive movements. And, to the extent that from this tangle one can still reach action, the obstacles that must be overcome are the same, only more difficult. *The tumult of the impulses is added to the confusion and tangle of thoughts and representations*. How to come to a *unity* of action, which is still necessary and without which there can be no concept of action?

Here ethics will be aided by the conceptual law of continuity. And here the judgment of the origin, as well as that of reality, will demonstrate their effectiveness and their usefulness."[79]

That which, in logic, is pure thought, which does not stop at being as foundation, but goes all the way back to nothingness as the methodical instrument for the founding of being in thought, in ethics is the pure will, which "according to continuity, must be produced starting from its origin."[80] In the pure will, the movement, as essential component of will and action, is not meant to be understood as a mere psychological datum, as an "inner" movement, "as a movement of germ impulses,"[81] but rather as a "pure movement," as a determination of time insofar as it is an "anticipation of the future,"[82] as it already appears in logic.

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[75] *Ibidem*.

[76] *Ibid.,* p. 107.

[77] *Ibidem*.

[78] *Ibid.,* p. 102.

[79] *Ibid.,* p. 104.

[80] *Ibid.,* p. 102.

[81] Cf. *ibid.,* p. 105.

[82] Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 105f.

Such a coincidence of thought and will in the continuity of movement is, for Cohen, a clear demonstration of the law of truth, that is, of the "connection and coincidence of the theoretical problem and the ethical problem." "The will stirs already in thought – Cohen writes – because movement stirs in thought."[83] The principle of the origin and of continuity, which is the method itself as the activity of *presupposing*, demonstrates this coincidence. Cohen writes: "Our concept of time is not the succession of one after the other, but so to speak the projection of *one before the other*. The future precedes us, the past follows us. In this anticipation of the future, on which time rests, movement and desire then also play a role (...).

And so one can also see that the transfer of the method of purity from logic to ethics *is not an adaptation*. In fact, this purity, which is expressed in logical characterization of the movement, absolutely refers to ethics, I would say deliberately. *By clarifying the kind of thinking in these terms the kind of will is already evident*. In fact what has always distinguished the will, the desire, from thought, is the fact that the latter proceeds cautiously, step by step, and not step before step, while it's as if will and desire always jumped ahead of us. But let us see, now, that even thought jumps and precedes us, and that only in this anticipation and in this preceding it gives rise to a series and to its members, and in this anticipation it produces not only its order, but also its content."[84]

The basic law of the truth is therefore that the critical method of thought, as a system, has no presuppositions, for it consists in presupposing, just like the purity of the method has no foundations because it is the founding. No prerequisite is given to reason or uncritically assumed by it, but pure reason, thought and will, proceeds by way of founding, by way of presupposing.

With respect to Deleuze's criticisms, then, it must be said not only that pure reason is not a representation, but also that this is precisely what distinguishes it from the reduction to psychology; not only that it is not the thought of identity (because identity is, yes, an important principle, but not the most important, since the foundation of thought occurs through the principle of the origin, which itself founds identity), but also that it does not have presuppositions, because precisely the act of presupposing is for it a critical anticipation, not a dogmatic assumption. The thought of which Deleuze speaks needs "claws," "an original violence inflicted upon thought," the "contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up,"[85] to be thrown like an impulse toward the unconditional. Pure rational thought, instead, moves from itself. The orientation toward truth and toward the good is not an adaptation of thought to the opinion of the many, is not orthodoxy, but is rather the demand of reason that is reason itself. Truth is the origin, and the good is the end, of all rational thought, of philosophy, not insofar as the two are admitted dogmatically, but insofar as they are the very mover of critical thought. Cohen writes: "Truth is not a treasure, it is a way to find it out. It is a method, but one that isn't and

[83] *Ibid.,* p. 107.

[84] *Ibid.,* p. 106.

[85] Cf. G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, cit., pp. 181f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 139.

cannot be isolated, but rather a method that harmonizes the fundamentally distinct interests of reason."[86]

It seems to me that, apart from contextual differences, there is an objective coherence between this methodological character of rational presupposing in Cohen and "the right of the need of reason"[87] of which Kant speaks. The relevant point, for Kant, is not the question of where reason derives its premises regarding the unconditional, but rather the fact that reason assumes them as *its* premises, that is not as illusory dogmatic knowledge (this is, according to Kant, Mendelssohn's error), but as rules of orientation of critical thought. In his letter to Jacobi on August 30th, 1789, he writes: "Wondering whether to come to this concept of theism reason could only be *awakened* by something that only history teaches us, or rather only by a supernatural inner influence incomprehensible to us, is a question which concerns a purely secondary aspect, that is, the genesis and the development of this idea. In fact, it can be also be argued that if the Gospel had not taught in all their purity the universal moral laws, reason now would not have an equally accomplished cognition of them, even though, because they subsist, (now) anyone can be persuaded of their justness and validity by reason alone."[88]

Even for Kant, then, as for Cohen, the "need of reason" is not a contingent or a foreign assumption that limits the rigor of its foundation, but a moment of rational thought itself, the moment for which, in systematically orienting itself toward the unconditional, rational thought welcomes but transforms an assumption of truth into the methodical anticipation for knowledge and action.

[86] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. 2.Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., p. 91.

[87] I. KANT, *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?*, cit., p. 137; Eng. trans. cit., p. 240.

[88] I. KANT, *Briefwechsel*, cit., Bd. 11., p. 76.

Theme II

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt	‘Tis but who loging knows,
Weiß, was ich leide!	My grief can measure.
Allein und abgetrennt	Alone, left of repose,
Von aller Freude,	All joy, all pleasure,
Seh ich ans Firmament	I thither look to those
Nach jener Seite.	Soft lines of azure.
Ach! der mich liebt und kennt,	Ah! Far is he who knows
Ist in der Weite.	Me, and doth treasure.
Es schwindelt mir, es brennt	I faint, my bosom glows
Mein Eingeweide.	‘Neath pain’s sore pressure.
Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt	‘Tis but who loging knows,
Weiß, was ich leide!	My grief can measure

(J.W. GOETHE, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Buch IV, Kap. 11, in *Goethes Werke*, hg. im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen, fotomechanischer Nachdruck der im Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, Weimar 1887-1919 erschienenen Weimarer Ausgabe oder Sophien-Ausgabe, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1987, 1. Abt., Bd. 22, p. 67; Engl. trans.: *The Works of J.W. von Goethe. With his Life*, by G.H. Lewes, ed. by N.H. Dole, transl. by Sir W. Scott, Sir Th. M. J. Oxenford, Th. Carlyle and Others, in Fourteen Volumes, Volume I., publ. by Francis A. Niccolls&Co., London and Boston n.d. [ca. 1912], Volume I., Book IV., chap. XI, pp. 293f.)

Cadenza 1
Unity of the Heart and the Scattered Self
A Postmodern Reading of Buber's Doctrine of Evil

The problem of evil is prominent in Martin Buber's thought. Some of his works are specifically dedicated to this subject, and he openly states that it constituted one of his earliest preoccupations.[1] The fully articulated and definite theory of evil developed by Buber has been widely analysed, interpreted, and discussed,[2] and I will not attempt an evaluation of these views. My purpose is rather to reflect on a general theme: the "new perspectives" of Buber's thought arising from his doctrine of evil. I shall merely present a brief summary of some of its essential and characteristic points to which reference is necessary for the considerations to follow.

Essentially Buber refuses to acknowledge good and evil as original polarities of being. Instead, he considers them as different and non-antithetical processes that take place in the human soul. As Buber wrote in the *Vorwort* to *Bilder von Gut und Böse*: "I was concerned above all to show that in their anthropological reality, that is, in the factual context of the life of the human person, good and evil are not, as they are usually thought to be, two structurally similar qualities situated at opposite poles, but two qualities of totally different structure."[3]

[1] Cf. M. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse* (1953), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., *Schriften zur Philosophie*, Kösel/Lambert Schneider, München – Heidelberg 1962 , p. 607; Eng. trans. M. Bullock, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1952, p. 63. Aside from *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, Buber's main works on the theme of evil are: *Gog und Magog. Eine Chronik* (1943), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 3., *Schriften zum Chassidismus*, Kösel/Lambert Schneider, München – Heidelberg 1963, pp. 999–1261; *Schuld und Schuldgefühle* (1957), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., cit., pp. 475–502; Eng. trans. in *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy. Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, ed. By J. Buber Agassi, with an Introduction by P. Roazen, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York 1999, pp. 110–138.

[2] Cf., for example, R. GOETSCHEL, *Le problème du mal dans la pensée de Martin Buber*, in *Martin Buber. Dialogue et voix prophétique. Colloque international Martin Buber 30–31 octobre 1978*, Istina, Paris 1980, pp. 28–44.

[3] M. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, cit., p. 607; Eng. trans. cit., p. 64 .

A. Poma, *Cadenzas*, Studies in German Idealism 18,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-52812-0_5

In *Der Geist des Orients und das Judentum,*[4] one of his famous *Reden über das Judentum*, Buber remarks the Eastern origin of the Jews and, because of this, he claims that the Jews have the power to bring new vitality to the West. Yet he also distinguishes the Jews' particularity compared to other types of Eastern people. The distinguishing characteristic is the Jews' awareness that the duality of forces is not inherent in the structure of the world – to which man would be bound – but rather constitutes a set of innermost phenomena of the soul projected onto the world.[5] The Jew shares with other Eastern people the imperative of unification as a primal necessity, and nevertheless, more than any other, he experiences the desire for unification (*Einheitsverlangen*)[6] – the yearning for the return (*teshuvah*)[7] – as a personal task and responsibility upon which depends the unification of the world: "the *Sehnsucht* of the world throbs in his desire for unification."[8]

True, Buber recognises that "good" and "evil" can also indicate "the opposites which are always latently present in creation" that, when known by man in his innermost being, "break out into actual reality."[9] But in this sense – reflected in the biblical image of the tree of knowledge – good and evil are "primitively comprehensive concepts" (*primitiv-umfassende Begriffe*), rather than the ethical concepts they were to become. They "still include the fortune and the misfortune or the order and the disorder which is experienced by a person, as well as that which he causes."[10] More importantly for our understanding of Buber's views, he notes a difference between the divine and the human perspective. According to Buber, only God may perceive the antithetical character of good and evil as an objective polarity. Man, however, lives and experiences evil, chaos, and disorder only from their inside. So man cannot experience good and evil, order and disorder, as real antitheses, because he cannot be conscious of both at the same time ("in him they can never be temporally coexistent"): "He knows oppositeness only by his situation within it; and that means de facto (since the yes can present itself to the experience and perception of man in the no-position, but not the no in the yes-position): he knows it directly from within that 'evil' at times when he happens to be situated there; more exactly: he knows it when he recognises a condition in which he finds himself whenever he has transgressed the command of God, as the 'evil' and the one he has thereby lost and which, for the time being, is inaccessible to him, as the good."[11]

The real ethical problem concerning good and evil occurs when man – living in disorder and in the whirling chaos of possibilities, in *thou vavou* or "confusion and

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[4] Cf. M. BUBER, *Der Geist des Orients und das Judentum,* in IDEM, *Der Jude und sein Judentum. Gesammelte Aufsätze und Reden*, mit einer Einleitung von R. Weltsch, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1993, pp. 45–63.

[5] Cf. M. BUBER, *Der Geist des Orients und das Judentum*, cit., pp. 51f.

[6] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 53.

[7] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 54.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[9] Cf. M. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, cit., p. 614; Eng. trans. cit., p. 76.

[10] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 613; Eng. trans. cit., p. 73.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 614; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 75f.

desolation" (*Irrsal und Wirrsal*)[12] – feels unable to remain in that situation.[13] He cannot live in dispersion, in the chaos of "imagery" (*Bilderei*), of "depictions of the heart" (*Malereien des Herzens*),[14] and looks for a way out. Using this notion of "imagery," "depictions," Buber revives and interprets the Talmudic doctrine of two "inclinations."[15] Inclination (*yetser)* is twofold because man experiences a laceration or an opposition within himself. The instinct, the elementary impulse[16] – "the power peculiar to man, without which he can neither beget nor bring forth"[17] – is not itself bad. On the contrary, it is "very good:"[18] man renders it bad, making it an autonomous and absolute principle, an idol for his soul.[19] Rather than two directions, alternatives, or two different "images" or "inclinations" between which man must choose, good and evil are the direction, the decision to unify one's heart, as prescribed in the recitation of *Shema' Israel*[20] – or, alternatively, the refusal to direct or unify one's heart, the non-decision that fixes and sinks the human heart into the chaos of possibilities, in the illusion of capturing a unified reality in chaos.[21]

Paradoxically, when man avoids decision and remains in chaos, he fails to preserve the range of possibilities and the richness of the Self, since this process takes place through the fixing of an illusory object[22] and through the assertion of an arbitrary Self.[23] In contrast, decision and direction are the transformation of chaos into the cosmos,[24] the unification of all possibilities in the unity of the soul,[25] rather than the random choice of a single possibility excluding the others: "Evil cannot be done with the whole soul; good can only be done with the whole soul."[26]

Rather than a choice between two "images," between two "inclinations," the choice of the good is the unification of the inclinations in the unity of heart.[27] Evil

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[12] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 640; Eng. trans. cit., p. 126. The same expression in the 1954 edition of Buber and Rosenzweig's translation of Scripture. In the 1926 edition the expression is translated as "Wirrnis und Wüste."

[13] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 641; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 126f.

[14] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 622; Eng. trans. cit., p. 91."Malereien des Herzens" is a quotation from Ps 73,7. An analogous situation is described in one of the most beautiful aphorisms of *Ich und Du*. See M. BUBER, *Ich und Du* (1923), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., cit., pp. 126f.; Eng. trans. R. G. Smith, T. & T. Clark, Edimburgh, n. d., pp. 70ff.

[15] Cf. M. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, cit., pp. 624ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 94ff.

[16] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 624; Eng. trans. cit., p. 94.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 626; Eng. trans. cit., p. 97.

[18] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 625; Eng. trans. cit., p. 95. In this context, Buber revives an ancient exegetical tradition. See *Bereshit Rabba* IX,7.

[19] Cf. M. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, cit., pp. 625; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 95.

[20] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 625f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 95ff.

[21] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 641ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 127ff.

[22] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 641; Eng. trans. cit., p. 127.

[23] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 646f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 136f.

[24] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 642; Eng. trans. cit., p. 129.

[25] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 642; Eng. trans. cit., p. 128.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 643; Eng. trans. cit., p. 130.

[27] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 625f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 95ff.

is the self-assertion of an imaginary Self obstinately insisting on itself.[28] Good is the direction of the heart that, starting from the chaos of the possibilities,[29] becomes what it really is.[30] Such a direction is a historical process called "conversion" (*die Umkehr, teshuvah*).[31] This conversion is not a redemption *from* evil but a conversion toward the unity of the heart and a redemption *of* evil. This, of course, is an important theme in Buber's thought in general, but it is particularly evident in his interpretation of Hasidism.[32]

It would be wrong to understand Buber's doctrine of evil as a reductive theory in the psychological sense: Buber himself argued quite forcefully against psychology and psychoanalysis in this regard.[33] It would be also mistaken to understand Buber's view as a doctrine of asceticism or personal bettering: rather, it is a general theory of history as the fulfilment of relationship – as historical redemption. Buber's doctrine is shaped in the light of historical and apocalyptic evil as the great evil, and intends to speak to this dimension of evil as well. In the "chronicle" *Gog und Magog*, the great evil is personified by Napoleon, but the book's date of publication (as Buber himself expressly declares)[34] allows one to read it as a reference to Hitler and the Shoah. Buber expresses the fundamental moral of the story in a sentence by Rabbi Yaakob Yizchak Hayehudi, where he propounds the same perspective on the problem of evil Buber later expressed more discursively in *Bilder von Gut und Böse*: "'Rabbi', he said in an almost failing voice, 'what is the nature of this Gog? He can exist in the outer world only because he exists within us?' He pointed to his own breast. 'The darkness out of which he was hewn needed to be taken from nowhere else than from our own slothful and malicious hearts. It is our betrayal of God that has made Gog to grow so great.'"[35]

Buber associates the humanism that is characteristic of his entire thought with the human voice, the *vox humana* as the "essence of the human turned into voice" ("die zu Stimme gewordene Essenz des Menschlichen").[36] This *vox humana* must, and can, always emerge from the struggle against Gog, from the "final battle of *homo humanus* against *homo contrahumanus*" ("Endschlacht des *homo humanus*

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[28] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 646f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 136f.

[29] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 640; Eng. trans. cit., p. 125.

[30] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 639; Eng. trans. cit., p. 123.

[31] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 646; Eng. trans. cit., p. 135.

[32] This is also one of the main points of Gershom Scholem's critique of Buber's interpretation of Hasidism. On this subject, see my essay: *Sull'interpretazione buberiana del chassidismo*, in "Annuario Filosofico," II (1986), pp. 239–257.

[33] Cf. M. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, cit., p. 639; Eng. trans. cit., p. 123.

[34] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 608; Eng. trans. cit., p. 65.

[35] M. BUBER, *Gog und Magog. Eine Chronik*, cit., p. 1043; cf. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, cit., p. 608; Eng. trans. cit., p. 65 .

[36] M. BUBER, *Das echte Gespräch und die Möglichkeiten des Friedens. Ansprache anläßlich der Verleihung des Friedenspreises des deutschen Buchhandels* (1953), in IDEM, *Nachlese*, Lambert Schneider, Heidelberg 1966, p. 223.

gegen den *homo contrahumanus*")[37]: this struggle against Satan, the "preventer" ("Hinderer"), takes place "within man and within mankind" ("im Menschen und im Menschengeschlecht").[38]

Buber's reflections on good and evil may be considered as a doctrine of *tiqqun* in the sense of a conversion of the heart. In this sense, his doctrine is a reiteration and revision of the traditional theme of the "unity of the heart" that is at the core of the biblical revelation and can be found in many strands of the Jewish tradition. To name just a few obvious examples, Bachja ibn Paquda turned it into his principle of the "Duties of the Heart" (*Hovot halevavot*), Hasidic lore is replete with the theme, and it also returns in the work of Hermann Cohen.

Having described, however briefly, the main elements of Buber's reflections on the theme of evil, we can now turn to the question of relevance. Does Buber's doctrine of the pure heart and the unified Self still have meaning in a postmodern world, in a culture of broken and dispersed Selves, in the age of the denial of the very existence of an integrated Self? Buber experienced his time as a period of crisis for both man and the Self.[39] But our time is unlike Buber's. Therefore the solution he presented cannot simply be transferred and applied to postmodern culture.

Buber describes his time as a time of crisis, marked by man's "being without a home" ("Hauslosigkeit"). He considers this age as temporary, as part of a historical alternation between "epochs of being at home" and "epochs of being without a home" ("Epochen der Behaustheit" and "Epochen der Hauslosigkeit").[40] This alternation, even if rendered problematic by the separation between life and thought in the wake of Hegel's thought, allows us to think of and believe in the possibility of a new "epoch of being at home" and also in a positive overcoming of the absence of "being at home" that characterises the crisis. Moreover, Buber actually interprets the situation of contemporary man as a crisis of the Self, which is caught and diminished in the apparent and inauthentic alternative between solipsistic individualism and depersonalised collectivism. However, he believes that if man were able to live his loneliness consciously, he could also set out toward a new humanism and toward regaining the possibility of a relation with God and with other human beings within the context of a real community. Buber understands the contemporary historical and cultural condition as a crisis of both the Self and the community, of the relation of the I with the human and the eternal Thou, but he also believes that this critical character of man's situation contains the seeds and the possibilities of a new humanism and a new fulfilment of authentic relations.

The postmodern perception of society and culture differs from Buber's perceptions. In this culture the feeling of homelessness and of the radical negation of every foundation are no longer experienced as a situation of crisis to be overcome or resolved, but rather as a positive demystification and frequently as a form of emancipation from alienating illusions. The nomadic, diasporic, or anarchic character of

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 230.

[39] Cf. M. BUBER, *Das Problem des Menschen* (1943), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., cit., pp. 307–407.

[40] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 317.

thought is not due to a loss of home and origin but it's the result of liberation from the totalizing tendency of reason. Thinking the unthinkable is not the property of a future humanism, attained by the overcoming of a crisis: it is the joyful Dionysian dance set in a present with no past or future. Shattering and negating the unity of the Self are experienced not as a flaw to be fixed but as the release of the scattered and schizoid drives repressed and removed through the violence of representation. In addition to the empirical or psychoanalytical I, which have long since been abandoned as figments of the imagination, man is also gladly repudiating the phenomenological and transcendental I.

Under such cultural circumstances, is it possible to maintain a doctrine of the unity of the Self, of the pureness of the heart, and of a philosophy of the I and Thou like Burber's? A mere retrieval of this doctrine would make little sense. It would merely represent the stubborn resistance of a truth of the past, unperturbed by a deviant and erroneous present, or even worse, a moralistic censure of the present *à la* Cato. Most importantly, the parameters of postmodernity may simply render it incomprehensible. Approaching Buber in this manner, however, clashes with one of the deepest vocations of Buber's thought, namely, the dialogue with the actual man, here and now, in the authentic acceptance of his present situation. Thus the question is whether postmodern culture and actual man, here and now, can still understand Buber's philosophy and agree with it, even if in part. In my opinion, this question is decisive, because if we are able to comprehend a philosophical view of the past, chances are that such a philosophy may still have something to teach us.

If we can find a positive answer to this question, then it should be possible to consider Buber's position without trying to blunt his thought in the attempt of adapting it to the postmodern condition. In fact, the opposite may be the case, if it can be shown that the premises of Buber's philosophy emerge fully only if we interpret them under the presupposition of a postmodern sensibility.

Let us consider a few of the basic propositions found in *I and Thou*. Here we read, "The *I* of the primary world *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primal word *I-It*;"[41] Furthermore, "there is no *I* taken in itself, but only the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* and the *I* of the primary word *I-It*."

"The existence of *I* and the speaking of *I* are one and the same thing" ("*Ich sein und Ich sprechen sind eins. Ich sprechen und eins der Grundworte sprechen sind eins*").

"When a primary word is spoken the speaker enters the word and takes his stand in it."[42]

In Buber's opinion, the I is established in the relation. It has always been clear that this establishing of the I does not occur prior to the relation and that it is not founded on a previous relation, as it cannot be derived from the past: the I has not been established, it is in the establishing. True, Buber thinks that there is a primary relation, eternally established by God with every man in creation and revelation, but

[41] M. BUBER, *Ich und Du*, cit., p. 79; Eng. trans. cit., p. 3.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 79; Eng. trans. cit., p. 4.

the complete and dialogical realisation of such a relation always takes place only in the instant and always depends on man's answer.

The postmodern perspective, however, adds another way to understand Buber's words, one that may of course be somewhat different from Buber's intention. Today one must also deny that the establishing of the I may be derived from the future**,** as an I that "will be established." Man's existential condition is – always and for everyone – that of a separated, lacerated and lost Self. This is the meaning of Buber's aforementioned assumption that man knows the antithetical character of good and evil only from within evil.[43] Conversion, or the unification and directedness of the heart, is always a task, a goal aspired to, but never a permanent possession.[44] Task and goal, however, could be understood from the perspective of the future, of history and projection. This is presumably what Buber meant by conversion. Today, however, when not only the certitude of foundation but every certitude is denied, including the teleological certitude of the future, it is still possible to experience the task as a critical sense of the present, as a longing (*Sehnsucht*) whose form is the lyrical presence of an absence. If so, then the loneliness referred to by Buber refers to a condition in which man may find himself, not in the sense of the I's withdrawal into itself from the dispersion into the It, but as a way of experiencing dispersion with the aim of letting the conscious absence of unity be the unceasing nourishment of the world's longing (*Sehnsucht*) for unity,[45] – a longing (*Sehnsucht*) for "return." Community, as a place of new revelation,[46] is then not a visible and safe place or a "home," but simply a space for the word in the nomadic existence of scattered Selves. A simple fire in the Desert of Sinai, but one can't see the mount; it is in front (*miqedem*) of *gan eden*, but one can't see the garden, nor *Shulamit*: around the fire, accidentally, nomads meet and tell one another stories, good words, which revive in their hearts the longing (*Sehnsucht*) for the word, before returning to their journey, parting ways, each following different directions. Relation may remain a reality, even if experienced as a dialogue between an I and a Thou that, rather than mutually confirming one another in their existence, look for and long for one another in their absence. In this way, as a prayer, there also remains the possibility of a relationship with God: "not assuming the truth of God's existence but addressing him" ("nicht, für wahr zu halten, daß es einen Gott gibt, sondern ihn anzureden")[47].

"In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions" (I Sam 3,1b). These words seem to describe our own days. But it is possible to experience silence as longing (*Sehnsucht*) for the word, eclipse as longing (*Sehnsucht*) for revelation. Maybe this longing (*Sehnsucht*), this 'optative' of the heart, is already conversion, intention, direction.[48] Buber describes this situation for us as follows:

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[43] Cf. M. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, cit., p. 614; Eng. trans. cit., p. 75.

[44] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 641; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 127ff.

[45] Cf. M. BUBER, *Der Geist des Orients und das Judentum*, cit., p. 53.

[46] Cf. M. BUBER, *Zwiesprache* (1930), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., cit., p. 180.

[47] M. BUBER, *Das echte Gespräch und die Möglichkeiten des Friedens. Ansprache anläßlich der Verleihung des Friedenspreises des deutschen Buchhandels* (1953), cit., p. 228.

[48] Cf. M. BUBER, *Gog und Magog. Eine Chronik*, cit., p. 1222f.

"According to a Jewish legend, the first human beings saw the setting of the sun for the first time on the day of their creation, after they had abandoned God and were taken away from the garden. They were terrified, for they could only understand it as the world sinking back into chaos because of their guilt. *They both cried, sitting across from each other, all night, and the great return occurred*. Then dawned the morning. Adam rose, captured a unicorn and brought him as a sacrifice instead of himself" ("Als die ersten Menschen, erzählt die jüdische Sage, am Tag ihrer Erschaffung Gott verworfen hatten und aus dem Garten vertrieben worden waren, sahen sie zum ersten Male die Sonne untergehen. Sie entsetzten sich, denn sie konnten es nicht anders verstehen, als daß durch ihre Schuld die Welt ins Chaos rückversinken solle. *Die beiden weinten, einander gegenübersitzend, die ganze Nacht, und ihre Umkehr geschah*. Da dämmerte der Morgen. Adam erhob sich, fing ein Einhorn und brachte es an seiner Statt zum Opfer dar").[49]

The postmodern perspective also sheds new light on Buber's translation of the Bible and gives this project particular contemporary relevance among his works. The theoretical parameters of this grand enterprise were such that, by definition, it could never be fully realized. The translation therefore instantiates the atmosphere of longing (*Sehnsucht*). Not only did Buber's and Rosenzweig's translation reintroduce the Bible as a "spoken word,"[50] but by presenting the Bible in this way, they reintroduced the "spoken word" in a general way. Today God's word may be rare because what may be generally rare is the spoken word. In the culture of a "linguistic turn," paradoxically, there is no longer room for the word. Derrida's perspective, where writing is asserted against phonologocentrism, has little correspondence to reality, at least to the phonetical and phonemic aspects of speech. The postmodern culture constitutes the culmination of a long process toward a domination of writing and an eclipse of orality. The spoken word no longer resounds. We have virtually forgotten all about it: tone, intensity, loudness, rhythm, accents, dynamics, agogics, and even the pause. But only in the sound of the spoken word can the lyric tone of longing (*Sehnsucht*) be heard. To make the word resound, to make it sound anew, even in our a-phonic and deaf situation, might be the only way for us to live the presence of the absent relation. This, at least, is the meaning and humour of the last smile of Rabbi David of Lelov. In Buber's telling: "And once again he smiled. 'You wish to know why I smile?' he said. 'I smile at God because I have accepted his world just as it is'" ("Und noch einmal lachte er. 'Ihr wollt wissen,' sagte er, 'warum ich lache? Ich lache Gott an, weil ich seine Welt angenommen habe, wie sie steht und geht'").[51]

[49] M. BUBER, *Gottesfinsternis*, in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., cit., pp. 520f. Italics added.

[50] Cf. M. BUBER, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (1964), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 2., *Schriften zur Bibel*, Kösel/Lambert Schneider, München-Heidelberg 1964, p. 1175.

[51] M. BUBER, *Gog und Magog. Eine Chronik*, cit., p. 1235.

Cadenza 2
Guilt Feelings, Guilt and Sin
Contemporary Man and Buber's Thought

The question raised by Buber in his 1957 essay, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, is of great importance: in fact, he argues for an objective reality of sin, which cannot be reduced to the subjective-psychological dimension of guilt feelings, but must be recognized and elaborated in the ontic, existential and ethical dimension it deserves.

Of course, the first and most obvious perspective found in this essay is the critical comparison with psychoanalysis. As is known, 1957 was a particularly significant year for the dialogue with psychoanalysts, which Buber had already started long before. During his second trip to the US, that year, he visited the University of Michigan, where, among other things, he had a significant public discussion with Carl Rogers. He also visited the Washington School of Psychiatry, where he held some important conferences, including the English version of *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*: *Guilt and Guilt Feelings.*[1] In view of the comparison with psychoanalysis, the essay in question can be summarized in three main points: two critical and controversial, one purposeful. First Buber denounces and rejects the psychoanalytic choice to reduce guilt to a subjective and purely psychological sense, to a neurotic symptom generated by the censorship of a superego – representative of suprapersonal, parental or social instances, as in Freud's view – or to a merely psychological phenomenon related to the solipsistic process of individuation, according to Jung's perspective. Second, as a result, Buber criticizes the setting of psychoanalytic therapy in general, which is intended only to free the patient from the symptoms of guilt feelings, in view of a purely eudaimonistic result – that is,

[1] Upon that occasion Buber also held two other important conferences: *Elements of the Interhuman* (German original: *Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen*, 1954) and *Distance and Relation* (German original: *Urdistanz und Beziehung*, 1950). The three conferences, together with the seminar between Buber and Rogers (*Dialogue between Martin Buber and Carl R. Rogers*) and three other essays (*What Is Common to All, The Word That Is Spoken, Man and His Image-Work*), were gathered by Maurice Friedman in *The Knowledge of Man. A Philosophy of the Interhuman*, ed by M. Friedman, Harper & Row, New York and Evanston 1965.

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psychic well-being – completely neglecting the problem of the elaboration of guilt and of the conquest of personal existential integrity. Finally he suggests to psychotherapists – without going beyond the boundaries of their profession and without venturing into amateurish and improvised practices of spiritual and religious guidance – that they should go up to the limits of their profession. In fact, the methodical and ethical relationship with the patient does not exclude, but rather requires the therapist to recognize the relationship between a psychological symptom, the actual event and the existential problem of guilt. The therapist should somehow take responsibility for it in the therapeutic relationship, which is always an interpersonal relationship, and offer the patient guidance towards the answer that they can give to the authentic problem, even if the patient does not immediately recognize such a problem to begin with.[2] Buber writes: "To all this the genuine doctor of souls stands opposed with the postulative awareness that he should act here as at once bound and unbound. He does not, of course, desist from any of his methods, which have in fact become adaptable. But where, as here, he becomes aware of a reality between man and man, between man and the world, a reality inaccessible to any of the psychological categories, he recognizes the limits that are set here for his methods and recognizes that the goal of healing has been transformed in this case because the context of the sickness, the place of the sickness in being, has been transformed. If the therapist recognizes this, then all that he is obliged to do becomes more difficult, much more difficult – and all becomes more real, radically real."[3] By this Buber does not intend to entrust the psychotherapist with the task of "giving salvation" to man in sin, nor with that of showing him the way of salvation. While sticking to her own task and her own method of "healing," the psychotherapist should rather lead the patient to the "watchtower" (*Warte*),[4] from which he can see for himself the authentic way and decide to follow it. According to Buber, this "watchtower," as we shall see, is the "conscience" (*Gewissen*).

As I said at the beginning, the subject of the following considerations is not this critical discussion with psychoanalysis (which I have here summarized briefly), even though it represents the main and most obvious theme of Buber's essay and occupies good part of it. What interests me here is rather to consider the theme itself: guilt, its ontic and existential reality, the way of its authentic development.

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[2] Cf. M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., *Schriften zur Philosophie*, Kösel- Lambert Schneider, München-Heidelberg 1962, pp. 483–485; Eng. trans. in *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy. Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, ed. by J. Buber Agassi, with an Introduction by P. Roazen, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York 1999.

[3] M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., pp. 481f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 117. Buber had already raised this problem in a draft for a conference: *Von der Verseelung der Welt*, of 1923 (cf. M. BUBER, *Nachlese*, Lambert Schneider, Heidelberg 1966, p.155); he had taken it up in the *Geleitwort* to the book by Hans Trüb, *Heilung aus der Begegnung*, del 1952 (cf. *ibid*, pp. 139–145), which he recalls in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., p. 482; Eng. trans. cit., p. 117; and reproposes it other times in his meeting with psychoanalists during his 1957 trip (cf. *Das Unbewußte*, in M. BUBER, *Nachlese*, cit., p.183; *The Martin Buber – Carl Rogers Dialogue. A new Transcript with Commentary*, ed. by R. Anderson and K. N. Cissna, State University of New York Press, Albany 1997).

[4] M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., p. 485; Eng. trans. cit., p. 120.

I feel authorized to do so by Buber himself who, in this essay, deals with both levels. In fact, as I said, in the first part he develops his critical remarks on psychoanalysis, its flaws and limits, as well as the fact that the psychotherapist should overcome such limits. In the second part, on the other hand, he sketches a theory of existential guilt and its elaboration, with reference to two literary cases: Stavrogin in Dostoyevsky's *Demons* and Josef K. in Kafka's *The Trial*. The link between these two dimensions is § 4, the central paragraph of the essay, in which Buber distinguishes three different spheres (law, conscience and faith) of elaboration of guilt and privileges the second for his considerations.

This last argument is the real point of transition between the two different dimensions of the discourse because it itself is presented with a double meaning. Buber in fact proposes it as an indication for the therapist not to venture into the sphere of law and that of faith, in which she has neither competence nor the legitimacy to enter, and as a piece of advice to consider the sphere of conscience as the place of the "authentic guilt feeling."[5] Therefore, this is where guilt is elaborated: the therapist must "know" (*wissen*)[6] this sphere so as to lead the patient to see it for himself. However, as the author goes on with his reflections, this selection of the sphere of conscience is no longer merely a methodological and ethical recommendation to the psychotherapist, but constitutes the preliminary choice of a philosophical analysis of the authentic elaboration of guilt. It is for this second dimension that the essay takes on a philosophical importance, so that Buber himself deems it worthy to appear in his *Schriften zur Philosophie*, in the *Werke*.

Finally, there is an aspect of this philosophical dimension of Buber's essay that I intend to take into account and discuss with special attention: his preoccupation with presenting an analysis of the argument suitable for the contemporary man.[7] After all, this concern to address contemporary man is an essential feature of all of Buber's work: it holds for all his philosophy, but also for his re-proposition of Hasidism, his *Verdeutschung* of the Bible and his reflection on it. Buber has always understood the whole of his intellectual work as a reflection of a man deeply involved in the existential, social, historical and political experience of his time, offered to his contemporaries as a contribution to the effort to understand the human condition and to see one's own individual and historical path. For this reason he was and is still recognized not only as a theorist, but also as a master.

Of course the "contemporary man" addressed by Buber was obviously *his* contemporary: that is, the man belonging to European culture in the first half of the twentieth century. However, it can't be denied that after WWII and the advent of technological society, Western culture underwent radical changes so that the man of this culture (which today we call postmodern) was deeply transformed not only in his way of living and thinking but also in terms of the very categories by which he understood reality. In the 1950s – when Buber wrote this essay – some had already noticed such radical changes and were trying to interpret them adequately (to make

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 481; Eng. trans. cit., p. 116.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 488; Eng. trans. cit., p. 123.

[7] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 486, 492, 493, 500; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 121, 127, 129, 135f.

one example, think of the Frankfurt school). Was Buber able to notice such transformations and to aptly re-think his analyses? Sticking almost exclusively to what he writes in the essay in question, I will try to show that he felt the need for adaptation, but resolved it in a rather unconvincing way, and that what he left from his previous thought would have been more appropriate to make a proposal in this sense – perhaps it would have been untopical from the point of view of cultural consensus, but valid as a critical sign for the man of today.[8]

Buber's choice to exclude the spheres of law and faith from the consideration of guilt while privileging the sphere of conscience could be attributed to reasons of expediency, as he had to address an audience made up of psychoanalysts, bound to neutrality with regard to the legal sphere and ideologically biased towards the religious sphere. However, without excluding this possible reason, one cannot think that a frank and brave philosopher like Buber could let such a thing determine his philosophical choices. What one can think, at least as a hypothesis, is that such a choice followed from an effective attempt to produce a reflection that would be faithful to the condition of the contemporary man. Buber certainly recognizes that "noteworthy relations often establish themselves"[9] between the abovementioned spheres and, in the conclusion of his essay, he hints at a mutual dependence between the sphere of conscience and that of faith, which is so essential for the believer that he "cannot entrust himself exclusively to either of them."[10] Nevertheless, *de facto*, he only considers "the middle sphere"[11] of conscience: this seems related to his analysis of the contemporary man as one who "not merely before the world, but also before himself, (…) refuses to concern himself with an ostensible state of guilt,"[12] while, on the other hand, precisely "we who are living today know in what measure we have become historically and biographically guilting."[13] In short, Buber's choice seems determined by his decision to face, understand and overcome "the basic nihilism in existential form"[14] of contemporary man through an existentialistic reference to conscience.[15] The term "conscience" might superficially appear to be a concession to the language of psychoanalysis, however it is not such at all: on the contrary, it is the means to claim an existential dimension, irreducible to the psychological one. This is attested by Buber's continual rejection of the psychoanalytical categories of "consciousness" (*Bewußtsein*) and "unconscious" (*Unbewußte*), "ego" and "super-ego." Against those, Buber sets completely different categories founded

[8] As said, this only holds in reference to the essay I'm considering here. To give my assessment a broader and more general value it would be necessary to go deeper into Buber's last writings, which I cannot and will not do here.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 487; Eng. trans. cit., p. 122.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 502; Eng. trans. cit., p. 138.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 488; Eng. trans. cit., p. 123.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 500; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 135f.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 486; Eng. trans. cit., p. 121.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 493; Eng. trans. cit., p. 129.

[15] Moreover, the literary texts to which Buber refers in his discourse, Dostoyevsky's *Demons* and Kafka's *The Trial*, belong to two authors to whom existentialism has devoted particular attention.

indeed on that of "greater conscience" (*größeres Gewissen*)[16], "a (…) conscience (…) that has become wholly personal" (*ganz personhaft gewordenes Gewissen*),[17] "conscience in this high and strict sense" (*Gewissen in diesem hohen und strengen Sinn*)[18], "great conscience" (*großes Gewissen*)[19], "abyss of I-with-me" (*Urtiefe des Ich-mit-mir*)[20], "high conscience" (*Hochgewissen*)[21]. In his essay he defines this existential conscience as follows: "Conscience means to us the capacity and tendency of man radically to distinguish between those of his past and future actions which should be approved and those which should be disapproved."[22]

This choice of conscience as the authentic place of the conscience and elaboration of guilt and Buber's existentialist choice therefore represent a meditated step taken by the philosopher, in which the concern for the dialogue with contemporary man seems to be crucial. Moreover, this choice is neither sudden, nor impromptu. Going back through the years prior to 1957, we can find significant signs that preceded it. I will mention only a few here: they are certainly single episodes, as such insufficient to support a complete interpretation of the evolution of Buber's thought, and yet I believe they are significant and able to help sketch a background to interpret the 1957 essay, so as to freely reflect starting from it.

In his *Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips*, added in 1954 as *Nachwort* to his *Schriften über das dialogische Prinzip,*[23] among the representatives of "free" philosophy (i.e. of the philosophy "no longer existentially rooted in a reality of faith"),[24] who have taken and developed the theme of dialogue, Buber cites Karl Jaspers: an eminent figure of existentialism (and psychiatry). Sure, Buber criticizes Jaspers' thought for its reductionism consisting in the denial of the reality of the transcendent God and its limitation within the boundaries of human existence. However, he concludes that criticism with an enigmatic recognition that this way, in a sense, can succeed: "This philosophy, no longer tied to the fundamental root of a reality of faith, by the mere fact that it protects a fundamental existentiality of the person who philosophizes, believes it can rule undisturbed in the new land, and in it own way it manages to do so."[25]

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[16] *Ibid.*, p. 489; Eng. trans. cit., p. 124.

[17] *Ibidem*.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 490; Eng. trans. cit., p. 125.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 491; Eng. trans. cit., p. 127, and *ibid.*, p. 498; Eng. trans. cit., p. 133.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 491; Eng. trans. cit., p. 127.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 494; Eng. trans. cit., p. 129. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 501; Eng. trans. cit., p. 137 ("at the height of conscience" [*auf der Höhe des Gewissens*] and *ibid.*, p. 502; Eng. trans. cit., p. 137 ("from the height of conscience" [*von der Höhe des Gewissens*] and "from the high conscience" [*von dem hohen Gewissen*]).

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 488; Eng. trans. cit., p. 123.

[23] M. BUBER, *Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips*, in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., *Schriften zur Philosophie*, cit., pp. 293–305.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 300.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 301.

A few years earlier (in 1950), in his essay on *Recht und Unrecht. Deutung einiger Psalmen*,[26] Buber explicitly recognizes "existence" as corresponding "in the lexicon of modern philosophy" to the "purity of heart" and also attempts a translation from one language to the other (and precisely in relation to the theme of guilt): "Purity of heart is an essential state: one is not pure, one can only become such. In fact, one is only essentially pure when one has become such, and even then one doesn't belong to a human type. It is not that 'evil' people, bad people, are set against good people; 'good' people do not exist. But there is good as such. And the good, the Psalmist says, is: stay close to God. He does not say that those who are close to God are good. But he can definitely say who are the bad people: the ones who are far away from Him. In the lexicon of modern philosophy one could say that there are men who have no part in existence, but not men who own existence. Existence cannot be owned, one can only take part in it. One does not rest on the lap of existence: one can only get close to it."[27]

Thus we come to the 1950 essay, *Urdistanz und Beziehung,*[28] on which I shall dwell a bit longer. First of all, note a relevant historical fact: as I pointed out earlier, its English version titled *Distance and Relation*, together with *Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen* (*Elements of the Interhuman*) and *Schuld und Schuldgefühle* (*Guilt and Guilt Feelings*), it was taken up by Buber in 1957 for the William Alanson White Memorial Lectures at the School of Psychiatry in Washington.[29]

The essay is well-known and has been widely discussed. Many years ago I interpreted it trying to minimize the shift it seems to represent from Buber's previous philosophy, highlighting the elements of continuity in it, despite everything.[30] Several years later I expressed myself more cautiously on the matter.[31] Now, instead – in the light of its relation to *Schuld und Schuldgefühle* and of my attempt to retrace the antecedents of Buber's hypothetical concession to existentialism – I intend to emphasize clearly the problematic gap between this paper and Buber's previous philosophy. Nathan Rotenstreich already noted that "the thought manifested in Buber's idea, in his later period, of original distance and relationship, leaves us wondering if relationship is indeed such a priority in the human sphere as he claimed in his earlier and more famous writings (…). The traces of a revision or a later thought in his theory come to light from this: he now speaks of 'the first movement of original self-distancing,' which would be 'a precondition of the

[26] M. BUBER, *Recht und Unrecht. Deutung einiger Psalmen*, in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 2., *Schriften zur Bibel*, Kösel-Lambert Schneider, München-Heidelberg 1964, pp. 953–990.

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 982f.

[28] M. BUBER, *Urdistanz und Beziehung*, in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., *Schriften zur Philosophie*, cit., pp. 411–423.

[29] Cf. *supra*, p. 95.

[30] Cf. A. POMA, *La filosofia dialogica di Martin Buber*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 1974, pp. 96ff.

[31] Cf. A. POMA, *Saggio introduttivo. La parola rivolta all'uomo occidentale*, in M. BUBER, *Il principio dialogico e altri saggi*, ed. by A. Poma, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1993, pp. 33, 280 note 2, 285 note 5.

second, that of entering in relation.'"[32] Rotenstreich traces the possibility of this turn in Buber's thought back to a misunderstanding that was already present in his original dialogic philosophy: that is, in the problematic coexistence of the theme of relationship with that of the innate Thou, of the primacy of relationship with the precondition of an I that opens up the space for this relationship. In Buber's dialogical philosophy, for Rotenstreich, the primacy of the relationship is what prevails, but the concurrent theme is still there and, in *Urdistanz und Beziehung*, it emerges powerfully.[33] Referring to a passage of the latter essay ("Original distance founds the human condition, the relationship founds human becoming in it"),[34] Rotenstreich comments: "If it is legitimate to introduce here the distinction between the frame and the picture in the frame, one could say that, in his later periods, Buber raises the question of the frame of the picture of human life. The picture, as before, is reciprocity, but must be explained through the determination of its position in the frame of the totality of the world and, to facilitate this determination of its position, Buber introduces the concept of original self-distancing."[35]

Buber's reply to Rotenstreich, despite his intentions, does not refute the objection, but rather confirms it: "This 'first movement' [the original self-distancing]" – writes Buber – "that once made up man as such, is definitely not a 'reflective attitude:' it is the original act, the original attitude of man. It is also the presupposition of man's entering-in-relation. More precisely: both acts are always and again proper of man in his original distance: it is proper of man to leave in his separation what is around him and with him, like something that belongs to him as an object, as an it; and it is proper of man, every time, to turn to a being as to what is before him, considering that being real, communicating with it as if with his Thou. With a 'reflective attitude' I am not able to connect this man's original state, without which there would be no language or tool. Man, I tell you, 'is the entity through the being of which being is separated from it.' Not through reflection, but through the being of man."[36] The assumption repeated here, which sounds existentialistic also for the language used, is very different from the assumption of the previous dialogical philosophy: "To achieve the conception that founds the idea of 'correlation' (*Zwischen*), one can no longer locate the relation between human beings as one is used to, by habit, both in the inner determinations of individuals and in the world that embraces these individuals and predetermines them, but on the basis of an actual reality '*between*' them. The 'correlation' is no auxiliary construction. It is the real place, is the 'support' that sustains what happens between people. If it has not attracted specific attention, it is due to the fact that, unlike individual being and the world-environment, it does not present an uninterrupted and undisputed continuity, but,

[32] N. ROTENSTREICH, *Gründe und Grenzen von Martin Bubers dialogischem Denken*, in *Martin Buber*, hg. von P. A. Schilpp und M. Friedman, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1963, pp. 97f.

[33] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 91.

[34] M. BUBER, *Urdistanz und Beziehung*, cit., p. 416.

[35] N. ROTENSTREICH, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

[36] M. BUBER, *Antwort*, in *Martin Buber*, hg. von P. A. Schilpp und M. Friedman, cit., p. 594.

time after time, it always constitutes itself again according to the type of human encounters."[37]

Therefore, consider the hypothesis – briefly formulated here – of Buber's existentialist perspective in his choice (in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*) to only consider the sphere of conscience as the place of recognition and elaboration of guilt. If such a hypothesis is plausible, then we should assess it especially in the light of the primary need of a discourse addressed to contemporary man. Of course Buber rightly rejects psychologistic reductionism: against "the anxiety-induced bugbears that are generated in the cavern of the unconscious,"[38] against guilt feelings, understood as mere "internalization of censure, torment, and punishment,"[39] he sets the "existential guilt,"[40] recognized by the "high conscience,"[41] by the "abyss of I-with-me,"[42] that is, by the "capacity and tendency," for which man is such that "he becomes for himself a detached object about which he can not only 'reflect,' but which he can, from time to time, confirm as well as condemn."[43] However, I must frankly object that precisely contemporary man has clearly and irreversibly recognized the illusoriness and the fallacy of consciousness, and that the attempt to bring him back to it through the existentialist way is doomed to failure, because consciousness has been definitively unmasked as false. Contemporary man knows and feels he cannot rely on the security of an original identity of the self, on a constituted and constituent subject; he lives and thinks as a dissolved, distracted, multiple and separate self; and therefore knows that this I, this consciousness, cannot be the place nor the foundation of anything. And it is certainly true, as Buber notes, that contemporary man – who more than any other could and should be aware of the guilt – "not merely before the world, but also before himself, (…) refuses to concern himself with an ostensible state of guilt."[44] However, what I wish to underline here is that, if there is a way for contemporary man to elaborate and recognize guilt, this way cannot be the return to the illusion of conscience, of the "before oneself."

By now, contemporary philosophy has widely denounced the fallacy of consciousness and has worked out its implications. Among the many philosophers who have participated in different ways and in different directions in this process, I'll mention here just one author: Paul Ricoeur, for the value and originality of his

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[37] M. BUBER, *Das Problem des Menschen*, in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1.:*Schriften zur Philosophie*, cit., p. 405. Partly quoted by N. ROTENSTREICH, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

[38] M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., p. 485; Eng. trans. cit., p. 121.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 490; Eng. trans. cit., p. 125.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 480 *passim*; Eng. trans. cit., p. 116 *passim*.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 494; Eng. trans. cit., p. 129.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 491; Eng. trans. cit., p. 127.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 488; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 123f. In this passage Buber explicitly refers to *Distanz und Beziehung*, so denying the subsequent negation of a "reflective" nature of this perspective of his: see the passage already mentioned above in M. BUBER, *Antwort*, cit., p. 594, reply to Rotenstreich's objection that he'd gone from a position of "reciprocity" to one of "reflection" (cf. N. ROTENSTREICH, *op. cit.*, p. 99; cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 110f.).

[44] M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., p. 500; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 135f.

thought, but also for two other reasons. The first is that he normally proceeds by explaining in broad summaries the previous elaborations (among which psychoanalysis plays for him a major role), basing his own original contribution on them, thereby making evident the momentous and irreversible character of the critique of "consciousness." He writes, for example: "the *cogito* is not only a truth as vain as it is invincible; we must add, as well, that it is like an empty place which has, from all time, been occupied by a false *cogito*. We have indeed learned, from all the exegetic disciplines and from psychoanalysis in particular, that so-called immediate *Gewissen* is first of all 'false *Gewissen*.' Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud have taught us to unmask its tricks. Henceforth it becomes necessary to join a critique of false consciousness to any rediscovery of the subject of the *cogito* in the documents of its life; a philosophy of reflection must be just the opposite of a philosophy of consciousness."[45] The second reason is that Ricoeur strictly connects this criticism of the philosophy of conscience with his equally known reflection on guilt: this makes the comparison with his thought particularly interesting, given the analogy with Buber's essay in question and with the reflections I intend to develop on it. For instance, Ricoeur writes: "guilt (…) is the accomplished innerness of sin; guilt gives rise to the '*Gewissen*' (…). But the instance of the '*Gewissen*' also gives rise to man-measure."[46] Of course Ricoeur unfolds his reflection in reference to a Christian and specifically Pauline perspective, in respect to which he cannot be compared to Buber; however, even within this different perspective, he highlights some interesting themes for reflection on Buber's thought. I mean here in particular the issue of the splitting self[47] and the theme of hope, that is, the connection between guilt and redemption.[48]

In reality, I think it is surely evident that, in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, behind the emphasised concept of conscience there is a much more ancient and interesting theme, rooted in the Bible and in the whole Jewish tradition: the theme of purity and unity of the heart. In *Recht und Unrecht* Buber himself, as we have seen earlier,[49] explicitly understands the existentialistic discourse as a modern translation of this ancient topic. This translation, however, leads to a severe reduction: the limitation, indeed, of the reflection to the sphere of conscience, without reference to the sphere of law and the sphere of faith. Yet the reference to the theme of "unity of the heart" is much more interesting than that to the theme of "conscience" for the contemporary man's reflection on the reality of guilt. First of all, as Buber himself states in a passage of *Recht und Unrecht*, the purity of the heart is an infinite task, but most of all it is a task for the man who understands himself as a "broken heart." The "broken

[45] P. RICOEUR, *Le conflit des interprétations. Essai d'herménrutique*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1969, pp. 21f.; Eng, trans. Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1974, p. 18. Of course Ricoeur uses the term "*conscience*:" the transposition into the German equivalent *Gewissen* is my own initiative to emphasise its continuity with the context.

[46] P. RICOEUR, *Finitude et culpabilité*, vol. II: *La symbolique du mal*, Aubier, Paris 1960, p. 138.

[47] Cf., for example, *ibid.*, pp. 137f.

[48] Cf., for example, P. RICOEUR, *Le conflit des interprétations*, cit., pp. 426ff.

[49] Cf. *supra*, p. 100.

heart" (*lev nishbar v^{e}nidkeh*; in Buber's translation: *gebrochenes, zerschlagenes Herz*) of Psalm 51 (v. 19) is the condition of man, which contemporary man may well recognize as his own, much more so than conscience.[50] Second, only in the broken heart can the disrupted self open up to the expectation of a redemption that shall be given to it: "Create in me a pure heart, O God." (*lev tahor b^{e}ra-li Elohim*; in Buber's translation: *Ein reines Herz schaffe mir, Gott*) (Psalm 51,12).

If you want to indicate an "watchtower" to contemporary man from where he can glimpse the way to the recognition and elaboration of guilt, that place must be able to show not only and not so much the sphere of conscience, but rather the spheres of law and faith, which do not appear in Buber's essay.[51]

The juridical law cannot be excluded for two fundamental reasons. First, it is the way, the method, without which it is impossible to recognize the social and political dimension of guilt. Buber himself has always given much attention to that dimension, which is continuously present – for instance – in the abovementioned essay *Recht und Unrecht*. One of Buber's main criticisms to Heidegger, in *Das Problem des Menschen*, is precisely that he secluded the awareness of guilt into the solipsistic sphere of conscience, instead of acknowledging its relational character in the responsibility towards a transcendent Thou.[52] Also in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle* Buber recognizes that "a man is always guilty toward other beings as well, toward the world, toward the being that exists over against him."[53] For this reason, he acknowledges that the elaboration of guilt necessarily entails – in addition to "self-illumination" (*Selbsterhellung*) and "perseverance" (*Beharrung*) – also "reconciliation" (*Sühnung*).[54] But the atonement cannot ignore the social and political dimension, as Buber himself implicitly detects in his criticism of the psychoanalytic solution to the case of Melanie, in particular of her indifference to the people she met in her institutional commitment to "welfare work."[55] The ethical commitment to the other person can not be entrusted to contingent feelings related to conscience, sympathy and emotional affinity: as explained by Hermann Cohen, the person who stands next to me (the *Nebenmensch*) can and must become the one I am together with (the *Mitmensch*) for an ethical commitment to eliminate his suffering, which is

[50] In *Recht und Unrecht* Buber himself, commenting on Psalm 73,26 ("My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever" [*Verendet mein Fleisch und mein Herz, der Fels meines Herzens, mein Teil, Gott bleibt in die Zeit*]), considers the theme of the broken heart, even if he only interprets it in the eschatological sense as man's being "undone" in the eternity of God when he dies (cf. M. BUBER, *Recht und Unrecht. Deutung einiger Psalmen*, cit., p. 983).

[51] It should be noted that the two literary places that Buber comments on are strongly characterized by both the legal dimension (Kafka's book deals precisely with a "process", however absurd it may be, and the confession that Stavrogin intends to draft, although not intended for a court, is meant to be made public) and the religious dimension (both characters speak with a priest: Buber himself notices this, see. M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., p. 496; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 131f.).

[52] Cf. M. BUBER, *Das Problem des Menschen*, cit., pp. 362–364.

[53] M. BUBER,*Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., pp. 501f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 137.

[54] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 488; Eng. trans. cit., p. 123.

[55] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 483; Eng. trans. cit., p. 118.

primarily social suffering. Only in this social and political dimension can atonement become true moral work and not a weak and illusory guilt feeling. This means that from the first moment of elaboration of guilt, the latter must be recognized in its social and political dimension.

For this reason, secondly, the legal dimension is indispensable, so that the confession of sin can take place in the community. The community is also always in the foreground in Buber's writings, so that it would be lengthy to list all the places where it operates. To name one among all, everyone remembers the effective expression in *Zwiesprache*: "We await a theophany of which we know nothing but the place, and this place is called community."[56] This community dimension does not appear in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*: rather, this essay explicitly excludes it as an element of the spheres of law and faith, but not of conscience. "The event of illumination corresponds on the plane of the law to the legal confession of guilt, on the plane of faith to the confession of sin. As a social concept, confession of guilt is naturally the most familiar of the three; what takes place here takes place in public in the legal institutions of society.

The confession of sin is spoken by a man when, seeking reconciliation with God, he directly or indirectly steps before the absolute judgment. That may happen in the chorus of the community, as at the Jewish Day of Atonement, or in the whispers of the confessing man into the ear of the confessor, or even in solitude by those who feel themselves as standing before God and their speech as addressing God: the confessing one is always removed from the anonymous publicity of society, but by no means referred to himself. He has one over against him who receives his confession, answers it, 'forgives' him – for the Jews, in a significant co-operation with him toward whom the confessing one has become guilty.

The matter is otherwise with the first of the three events in the action of the great conscience, the event of illumination. Here a man ventures to illuminate the depths of a guilt which he has certainly recognized as what it is, but not yet in its essence and its meaning for his life. *What he is now obliged to do cannot be accomplished in any other place than in the abyss of I-with-me*, and it is just this abyss that must be illuminated.

Legal confession of guilt means a dialogue with the representatives of society who re-join as judges according to the penal law. Religious confession means a dialogue with the absolute divine person who replies in mysterious fashion out of his mystery. As for the illumination of essence, it is in its most real moments not even a monologue, much less a real conversation between an ego and a superego: all speech is exhausted: what takes place here is the mute shudder of self-being."[57]

Buber was notoriously distrustful of the institutional dimension in every field, suspicious of every objectifying structuring that may constitute an obstacle to the free realization of the event in its absolute novelty and uniqueness. However, the renunciation of the community space, which nevertheless implies some form of institutionalization – legal, liturgical and other (in fact, not even the charismatic

[56] M. BUBER, *Zwiesprache*, in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., *Schriften zur Philosophie*, cit., p. 180.

[57] M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., pp. 491f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 126f.; my emphasis.

community, like the Hasidic one that Buber takes as a model, can do without an institutional dimension) – amounts to negating the place for confession and for the elaboration of guilt, or better, it means replacing it with the illusory place of conscience.

On this point it seems appropriate to recall the lessons of Hermann Cohen, who, at the beginning of the past century, had recognized the illusory nature of *Gewissen* as a place of confession of guilt. He wrote: "Thus *conscience* is the tribunal! In that case we would have found the court before which the individual can originate and must exist as an individual. Why then also a tribunal before God?

If conscience were a sufficiently correct concept, then at no time would a philosophic ethics be necessary. Conscience is a daemon which everyone has in common with Socrates. But Socrates himself did not let himself be satisfied with it, but paved the way for ethics."[58]

Thus overcoming the enigmatic instance of conscience, in his broad critical elaboration of the overcoming of sacrifice and the recovery of its ethical and religious significance – in the Jewish tradition as well as in the interpretation of the elaboration of guilt in the Yom Kippur holiday – Cohen highlights the importance of community. He writes: "The way legal procedure shows us in the self-confession of guilt by the criminal is the right way (…). Where is there an analogy to legal procedure? The return would remain merely a word of admonition, and the confession of guilt, too, would not become an actuality if it were not joined to a public institution. Is there such a public institution for the religion of the individual?

At this point the problem of *divine worship* arises (…). But [the] sin is not an end-station for man, but rather an ever-repeated beginning of an ever-opening new life.

This constantly new beginning must be joined to a public institution; it cannot be actualized merely in the silence and secrecy of the human heart. It is the meaning of all moral institutions that they support the individual in his moral work. This indeed is also the meaning of legal formulations, that they formulate the idea of the will, and through this help man to achieve the actuality of action. A similar actuality is to be demanded for confession and to be sought in a public institution. This desire is satisfied by divine worship."[59]

This importance, attributed by Cohen to the community for the elaboration of individual guilt, is not established abstractly, but relates to an essential moment of this elaboration: redemption and forgiveness. Cohen writes: "The self-knowledge of sin is indeed a transitional point for the engendering of the I, but it is not the conclusion. The conclusion is the atonement, which depends on liberation from the consciousness of guilt.

Of course, this liberation has not to be self-liberation (…). However, the individual needs the congregation for his confession, and within the congregation, sac-

[58] H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, hg. von Benzion Kellermann, Fock, Leipzig 1919; hg. von Bruno Strauss, J. Kaufmann, Frankfurt a.M. 1929; repr. J. Melzer, Köln 1959, p. 217; Eng. trans. S. Kaplan, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., New York 1972, p. 186.

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 227f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 195f.

rifice. The public institution of the congregation must help the individual to mature into the I (…). And its first sign is the judgment: any sin of man, insofar as it qualifies for purification because it is not entirely derailed from human tracks, may be understood as *shegagah* [unintentional sin]."[60] A little later Cohen clarifies: "But man is not permitted to give himself this explanation, this security of man against his own mistake, for then it would impair his self-knowledge. This justification can be granted to him by a public institution only."[61]

With the theme of forgiveness and redemption we meet the sphere of faith. As it turns out, even Buber, in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, is aware of the importance of this sphere and, in a passage quoted above, he also makes reference to the importance of "forgiveness" and to its community proclamation in the Jewish holiday of the "day of reconciliation," but in fact he relegates everything to the sphere of faith, which he does not take into account. The result, however, is to expunge the time of redemption from the consideration of guilt.

The sphere of faith, the dimension of redemption, is essential in the elaboration of guilt, not only because it alone enables the confidence in a positive outcome of this elaboration, but also because in it the identity of the I, the unity of the heart, can also have a meaning for the disintegrated subject, for the broken heart – not in the sense of the enigmatic deep identity of conscience, but in the infinite direction of the task and the yearning (*Sehnsucht*), to which corresponds the trust (*Vertrauen*) in God's redemptive goodness. This means that, for man, guilt becomes sin before God. Hermann Cohen provided a crucial clarification on this point as well. In his consideration of sin "purely methodologically as the means for the discovery of man as I, and thereby as the true individual,"[62] he sheds the right light on the correlation between sin and redemption: "In the spirit of the theodicy one could say: sin is explainable through God's forgiveness of it."[63]

"Sin" is the name by which man recognizes his guilt before God, the redeemer. The confession of sin is certainly the first moment necessary for man's self-liberation, but at the same time this is possible only in the light of divine redemption. The confession of sin is the recognition of redeemed guilt, without which the work of self-liberation, repentance and atonement would not be possible, because it would lack the horizon of hope. In 1915, in *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie*, Cohen wrote a very lucid page on the implications of renouncing the culture – contemporary to him – of the dimension of faith in the consideration of guilt: "It is a big mistake of modern culture to consider the arguments of religion as old material and historical material of mythology. The reaction to these prejudices of a unilateral culture shows itself even in the restricted activities of philosophy. *Pessimism*, this obstacle to true ethics, could not propagate in this manner and degenerate into fanaticism and obscurantism, if the religious speculation within its ethical boundaries had been recognized in its scientific meaning. *Sin is a ferment of*

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 233; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 199f.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 234; Eng. trans. cit., p. 200.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 210; Eng. trans. cit., p. 180.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 243; Eng. trans. cit., p. 208.

morality, and the stage of sin through which the *individual* goes, therefore, is an immovable element in man's moral conceptual chain. And in the same way the *God of forgiveness*, *redemption* and *reconciliation* is certainly not a myth, but, in constituting a necessary integration of the God of ethics, also allows for that labour that frees the individual – a labour that without the goal of grace would lose *the sense of its way.*"[64]

Martin Buber certainly did not ignore this truth. He has often restated it in his works, despite leaving it on the background in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, in his excessive concessions to the existentialistic perspective of conscience. If we go through his previous texts, we'll easily find this theme. For instance, it is interesting to note that in his abovementioned *Recht und Unrecht* (1950), just as in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, Buber talks about Kafka's reflections on Psalm 82, which influenced his novel *Der Prozeß*. In his 1950 work, though, Buber adds a critical judgment about the absence in Kafka of the perspective of faith: he doesn't express such a judgment in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, or rather replaces it with the demand of self-enlightenment of conscience.[65] In fact, in *Recht und Unrecht* Buber writes: "Our contemporary Jew, Franz Kafka, has composed with his works a commentary on the premises of this Psalm [Psalm 82]: on its premises – I insist – and not on the whole Psalm. Kafka describes the world of men as a world delivered to intermediate beings, who play their absurd and perverse game. From Him who remains unknown, and who gave the world in their impure hands, comes no message of consolation, no promise. He is, but He is not here.

What is lacking in the vision of Kafka, a man of our time, is here, in this Psalm."[66]

To put the contemporary man in front of his guilt, then, one should be aware of his situation, of the broken heart, of the dissolved subject. Buber himself, in *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, in 1953, had set out two important principles, one of which he also mentions in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*[67]: first, that man knows good and evil only and always within evil[68]; second, that one cannot do evil with the whole soul, while good can only be done with the whole soul.[69] So, in *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, he rightly notes that the condition of the contemporary man is not the same as Stavrogin's – "the uncanny negative certainty, 'Human values are beginning to shat-

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[64] H. COHEN, *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie*, IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Georg Olms, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York, Bd. 10., 1996, p. 65.

[65] Cf. M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., pp. 499f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 135.

[66] M. BUBER, *Recht und Unrecht. Deutung einiger Psalmen*, cit., p. 970.

[67] Cf. M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., p. 491; Eng. trans. cit., p. 126.

[68] "He knows oppositeness only by his situation within it; and that means de facto (since the yes can present itself to the experience and perception of man in the no-position, but not the no in the yes-position): he knows it directly from within that 'evil' at times when he happens to be situated there; more exactly: he knows it when he recognises a condition in which he finds himself whenever he has transgressed the command of God, as the 'evil' and the one he has thereby lost and which, for the time being, is inaccessible to him, as the good" (M. BUBER, *Bilder von Gut und Böse* (1953), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 1., *Schriften zur Philosophie*, cit., p. 614; Eng. trans. M. Bullock, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1952, pp. 75f.).

[69] "Evil cannot be done with the whole soul; good can only be done with the whole soul" (*ibid.*, p. 643; Eng. trans. cit., p. 130).

ter'" – but rather the same as Josef K.'s: "the still more uncanny uncertainty, 'Do world-meaning and world-order still have any connection at all with this nonsense and this disorder of the human world?' – an uncertainty that appears to have arisen out of that negative certainty."[70] Then one can understand that the "watchtower" from which contemporary man can find his own way is not the supposed depth or height of consciousness, but only the void of *Sehnsucht* – a void, however, that by its very presence can make him able to receive the word that is given to him: if it is a word of forgiveness, it can reveal to man his guilt and thereby the way to the unity of the heart. The yearning of the broken heart ("a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise:" Psalm 51,19b) and the trust that one might gain a pure and unified heart ("Create in me a pure heart, O God:" Psalm 51,12a) are the two related poles between which dwells the dissolved subject that is contemporary man, and only between these two poles can he recognize his own fault. Such recognition, then, cannot be the "self-enlightenment" of a consciousness that delves into the intricacies of its own solid foundations, but rather the "revelation" (*Offenbarung*) that the broken heart receives as a gift and as the way to its unification.

In his more proper and original thought, free from any concern to adapt to the stereotypes of existentialism, Martin Buber pointed this very path to contemporary man. As evidence of this, I wish to conclude with a brief but eloquent passage from his essay dated 1936, *Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel*: in this passage, in which one can already clearly perceive the critical attitude towards psychoanalysis, the path indicated by Buber is not that of the self-enlightenment of consciousness, but precisely that of the yearning and confidence in the gift of revelation. Buber writes: "It is experienced that one should suddenly observe in oneself some knowledge that was not there before and to whose rise nothing could lead. The explanation by means of the famous unconscious, which comes from the widespread superstition that the dear soul does all by itself, basically means no more than: the very thing that you experience as something that has come to you was already there in you, where everything is and where nothing is known. Such a thing is a provisional construction, useful for psychological orientation, but it crumbles down when I try to truly rely on it. No, what happened to me is precisely otherness, being grasped by the other. Nietzsche has expressed this honestly: 'one takes – one does not ask who gives.' But I think that what matters, when taking, is precisely to know that one gives. He who takes what is given to him and does not experience the giver's giving does not receive, and the gift turns into a robbery. But if we experience the giving, then we experience that revelation exists. And we walk down the road on which our life and the life of the world are revealed to us as a sign language, the access road. On it we shall find what is great, which is of the same type as what is small."[71]

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[70] M. BUBER, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, cit., p. 494; Eng. trans. cit., p. 129.

[71] M. BUBER, *Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel*, in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 2., *Schriften zur Bibel*, cit., p. 857.

Cadenza 3
"Magic Mirror on the Wall" The Lie of the Bourgeois Subject and the Wandering of the Broken Subject

Consciousness is the supreme instance in which the bourgeois subject knows and recognizes himself, examines and evaluates himself, judges and justifies himself. That instance is generally recognized and accepted without debate or doubt: it is the ultimate and authoritative source of truth on oneself, to which every other authority – be it legal, moral or divine – must submit. In bourgeois culture every individual only feels obliged to comply with the law if what it prescribes is approved by his conscience, and he feels entitled to violate these requirements if this is done "following his conscience."

What is this conscience? The image of it that is generally taken as appropriate is the mirror. Conscience is a mirror in which the subject is reflected. That is: in it he sees and contemplates himself, certain of finding a truthful image in it. However, it is also a mirror that can and should be asked for a judgment of confirmation and justification. The subject reflected in the mirror of her conscience is significantly described in the very famous tale by the Grimm brothers *Snow White* (*Schneewittchen*). The Queen of the tale, Snow White's stepmother, asks the "magic mirror:"[1] "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?"[2] Therefore she asks the mirror to tell her the truth about herself, even if the question is rhetorically generic, and gets an answer of confirmation: "You are the fairest of them all."[3] This strange, magic mirror, therefore, does something that no other mirror can do: it doesn't simply reflect an image, but formulates a judgment. This is possible because the very subject that is reflected is already a judging subject: she looks at herself to be confirmed; indeed, this mirror, too, gives nothing but an image – the image of her own

[1] BRÜDER GRIMM, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, nach der Großen Ausgabe von 1857, textkritisch revidiert, kommentiert und durch Register erschlossen, hg. von H.-J. Uther, Eugen Diederichs Verlag, München 1996, 1. Band, p. 262; Eng. trans. Ariel Books, Kansas City, 1991, p. 23.

[2] *Ibidem*.

[3] *Ibidem*.

A. Poma, *Cadenzas*, Studies in German Idealism 18,
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self-judgment. This is therefore a very different situation from that of the many “prince’s mirrors” of Medieval culture, where the subject often unwillingly undergoes a test and a model that are indeed external, judging and reprimanding him; here the instance before which the subject examines herself is only seemingly external, but it’s actually the false dialogue between the subject and herself – a form of solipsism disguised as dialogue.

Even when, as in the tale, the mirror refers to another antagonist image, this is not really an other, but an *alter ego*, which is not seen and recognized in its difference but only as a double, a rival that, by their very existence, claims to take the subject’s place and therefore to annihilate it – so the rival must be annihilated. The Queen asks the mirror the same question as usual, but receives a different answer: “You are very fair, ‘tis true./ But Snow White is more fair than you!”[4] Snow White is reflected as the “other than you” (*als Ihr*), the incompatible, intolerable other, the antagonist double, the rival that must be annihilated with violence, because her very existence is violence by which the subject is threatened in her very identity. This nature of *alter ego*, which empties the other of any personality of their own and reduces them to the rival double, is even more explicit in the answer the mirror gives when the Queen, after failing to kill Snow White, has to succumb to her enemy, denied by her, and asks the mirror one last time: “she [the Queen] stepped before her mirror and said: Mirror, mirror, on the wall, /Who in this land is fairest of all? The mirror answered: You, my queen, are fair; it is true./But the young queen [*die junge Königin*] is a thousand times fairer than you.’”[5]

However, one must know how to speak to this magic mirror of conscience: it replies with the bourgeois truth only if the person asking is indeed a bourgeois and asks appropriately. The mirror is able to reflect and confirm the identity of the subject, but that person must have an identity and want to confirm it, therefore they must avoid any dispersion, select the identical by removal and obsessive fixation and, of course, arrange such an identity around its very core, what constitutes the bourgeois identity: that is, around work, economic activity, and property. In this respect it is very interesting to look at the difficult and conflicting relationship that constantly takes place between the brothers Thomas and Christian in Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*. They appear together[6] and in the course of the work they are in unceasing conflicting confrontation, since Thomas just cannot accept, and indeed openly disapproves of, the “false” conscience that haunts Christian. Talking about Christian with his sister Tony (Antonie), Thomas is explicit: “‘Yes,’ said Tom, ‘I understand what you mean very well, Tony. Christian is very incautious – undignified – it is difficult to express what I mean. Something is lacking in him – what people call equilibrium, mental poise. On the one hand, he does not know how to keep his countenance when other people make naïve or tactless remarks – he does

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 271; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 38ff.

[6] Cf. Th. MANN, *Buddenbrooks. Verfall einer Familie*, in IDEM, *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1960–74, Bd.1., p. 16; Eng. trans. H. T. Lower-Porter, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1957, p. 12.

not understand how to cover it up, and he just loses his self-possession altogether. But the same thing happens when he begins to be garrulous himself, in the unpleasant way he has, and tells his most intimate thoughts. It gives one such an uncanny feeling – it is just the way people speak in a fever, isn't it? Self-control and personal reserve are both lacking in the same way. Oh, the thing is quite simple: Christian busies himself too much with himself, with what goes on in his own inside, Sometimes he has a regular mania for bringing out the deepest and the prettiest of these experiences – things a reasonable man does not trouble himself about or even want to know about, for the simple reason that he would not like to tell them to anyone else. There is such a lack of modesty in so much communicativeness' (…). 'I'll tell you,' he went on after a pause, throwing his cigarette through the wrought-iron lattice into the stove. 'I have thought a great deal about this curious and useless self-preoccupation, because I had once an inclination to it myself. But I observed that it made me unsteady, hare-brained, and incapable – and control, equilibrium, is, at least for me, the important thing. There will always be men who are justified in this interest in themselves, this detailed observation of their own emotions; poets who can express with clarity and beauty their privileged inner life, and thereby enrich the emotional world of other people. But the likes of us are simple merchants, my child; our self-observations are decidedly inconsiderable. We can sometimes go so far as to say that the sound of orchestra instruments gives us unspeakable pleasure, and that we sometimes do not dare try to swallow – but it would be much better, deuce take it, if we sat down and accomplished something, as our fathers did before us.'"[7]

The subject who loses sight of his identity, for Thomas, gets lost in folly and hallucination, looses his "mental poise," and rambles, in the same way as "people speak in a fever." Here one sees the great bourgeois fear of folly. "Unreason," to use Foucault's term,[8] is always threateningly there at the edge of reason, it is essentially hallucination for the bourgeois culture; all other mental disorders do not scare the bourgeois subject, for he has learned to accept them in the acceptable domain of what he calls "reason" and indeed to make good use of them to strengthen his identity. Hallucination is to mistake for reality what is not real, and reality is defined by the material conditions of bourgeois existence, precisely by work, economic activity and property. On these objective conditions the subject must question his conscience: every other introspection leads to hallucination, delirium and loss of identity. When Thomas observes that it is better to measure oneself and find justification on the sole parameter of work and profit, his sister Tony replies in a strangely similar way to the Queen of the fairy tale, that is, by reference to their rivals: "Yes, Tom, you express my views exactly. When I think of the airs those Hagenströms put on."[9]

Thomas fears Christian just as bourgeois reason fears "unreason," which is its double, the ever-looming threat to its identity, built and defended with difficulty by removal and obsessive fixation. Thomas confesses to Christian: "I have become

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 264ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 203f.

[8] M. FOUCAULT, *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Plon, Paris 1961.

[9] Th. MANN, *op. cit.*, p. 266; Eng. trans. cit., p. 204.

what I am because I did not want to become what you are. If I have inwardly shrunk from you, it has been because I needed to guard myself – your being, and your existence, are a danger to me.”[10]

Christian is the subject devoid of balance, who rambles, who prefers the dissipated, illusory world of theatre to the serious and balanced real world of work. So Thomas scolds him: “As in the theatre! Yes, I think your right place is that of a comedian in a *café chantant*. I am not joking. I am perfectly convinced that is your secret ideal (…) you haven’t the slightest notion of work, and spend your days storing up a lot of feelings and sensations and episodes you hear in the theatre and when you are loafing about, God knows where; you take these and pet them and study them and chatter about them shamelessly.”[11] In fact Christian is much less different than what his siblings, Thomas and Tony, believe. He too is a bourgeois, he too fights to form a consciousness that would reflect him as identical and save him from dissipating, and does so by following precisely the same method as the others: removal and obsessive fixation. Christian is a hypochondriac by choice and he lucidly explains Thomas: “Christian shook his head vehemently and put up a warning finger. ‘As far as that goes, Tom, you don’t understand very well, you know. The thing is – everyone must attend to his own conscience, so to speak. I don’t know if you understand that – Grabow has ordered me a salve for the throat muscles. Well – if I don’t use it, if I neglect it, I am quite lost and helpless. I am restless and uncertain and worried and upset, and I can’t swallow. But if I have been using it, I feel that I have done my duty. I have a good conscience, I am quiet and calm and can swallow famously. The salve does not do it, you know, but the thing is that an idea like that, you understand, can only be destroyed by another idea, an opposite one. I don’t know whether you understand me.’”[12]

Thomas can very well understand him, but doesn’t want to: he believes to be firmly founded in the conscience of his own identity, in which he is reflected, and regards with contempt Christian’s fragility, constantly shaken by the winds of appearance and fantasy. Thomas doesn’t know that as soon as his mirror cracks, as soon as his identical and well balanced figure blurs, he too will face the same threat of disintegration and, just like his brother, he will have to find shelter in the maniacal method of hypochondria. At the end of the novel Mann describes him as follows: “He was empty within. There was no stimulus, no absorbing task into which he could throw himself. But his nervous activity, his inability to be quiet, which was something entirely different from his father’s natural and permanent fondness for work, had no lessened, but increased – it had indeed taken the upper hand and become his master. It was something artificial, a pressure on the nerves, a depressant, in fact, like the pungent little Russian cigarettes which he was perpetually smoking. This craving for activity had become a martyrdom; but it was dissipated in a host of trivialities. He was harassed by a thousand trifles, most of which had actually to do with the upkeep of his house and his wardrobe; small matters which

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 580; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 447f.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 320; Eng. trans. cit., p. 245.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 319; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 244f.

he could not keep in his head, over which he procrastinated out of disgust, and upon which he spent an utterly disproportionate amount of time and thought.

What outsiders called his vanity had lately increased in a way of which he was himself ashamed, though he was without the power to shake off the habits he had formed. Nowadays it was nine o'clock before he appeared to Herr Wenzel, in his nightshirt, after hours of heavy, unrefreshing sleep; and quite an hour and a half later before he felt himself ready and panoplied to begin the day, and could descend to drink his tea in the first storey. His toilette was a ritual consisting in a succession of countless details which drove him half mad: from the cold douche in the bathroom to the last brushing of the last speck of dust off his coat, and the last pressure of the tongs on his moustache. But it would have been impossible for him to leave his dressing-room with the consciousness of having neglected a single one of these details, for fear he might lose thereby his sense of immaculate integrity – which, however, would be dissipated in the course of the next hour and have to be renewed again.

(…) when he left it [his dressing-room], the fresh underwear on his body, the faultless elegance of his clothing, the smell of the brilliantine on his moustache, and the cool, astringent taste of the mouth-wash he used – all this gave him a feeling of satisfaction, and adequacy, like that of an actor who has adjusted every detail of his costume and make-up and now steps out upon the stage. And, in truth, Thomas Buddenbrook's existence was no different from that of an actor – an actor whose life has become one long production, which, but for a few brief hours for relaxation, consumes him unceasingly."[13]

Another member of the Buddenbrook family, the little Hanno, son of Thomas, escapes the bourgeois consciousness, frees himself from the image of his identity and forms his own subject in a wholly different way, which I will have to examine, because it is an interesting model of the wandering subject, which I will consider to conclude. First, though, I want to ask whether this concept of conscience and the image of the mirror representing it are rooted in the Western tradition. It will be easy to note that, in the two deep roots of our culture – the Greek and Roman traditions on the one hand, and the traditions of Jewish and Christian monotheisms on the other – not only is there no precedent, but there are totally different and dissonant meanings and symbols.

As for the Greek and Roman tradition, one cannot help but think immediately of the myth of Narcissus. According to the narrative of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus, "whom a nymph might love even as a child,"[14] comes to the world marked by the destiny that the foreseer Tiresias predicts for him: he shall live and reach his old age only "if he ne'er knows himself."[15] But Narcissus is not capable of knowing the others: a crowd of young men and young women would want to approach, know

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 612ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 473f.

[14] "iam tunc qui posset amari"(III 345). This passage and the following are taken from: OVID, *Metamorphoses*, with an English translation by F. J. Miller, in two volumes, I: Books I-VIII, Harvard University Press-William Heinemann Ltd., Cambridge (Massachusetts)-London 1951.

[15] "Si se non noverit" (III 348).

and love him, “but in that slender form was pride so cold that no youth, no maiden touched his heart.”[16] The beautiful nymph Echo loves him too, would want to meet him, and “comes forth from the woods that she may throw her arms around the neck she longs to clasp,”[17] but “he flees at her approach and, fleeing, says: ‘Hands off! embrace me not! May I die before I give you power o’er me!’”[18] One of the young men, devastate by unrequited love, pronounces the curse of Narcissus: “So may he himself love, and not gain the thing he loves!”[19] This is indeed what happens when Narcissus happens to contemplate himself in the image reflected by the stretch of water at a source: “while he drinks he is smitten by the sight of the beautiful form he sees. He loves an unsubstantial hope and thinks that substance which is only shadow.”[20]

Therefore the mirror, in this case, is not at all the source of truth and knowledge; quite the opposite, the image reflected by it is illusion and deceit. Instead of finding himself, Narcissus looses himself in it; instead of becoming conscious of himself, he intoxicates and deceives himself in it; the reflected image in the mirror is narcotic, hallucination, alienation for Narcissus: “O fondly foolish boy, why vainly seek to clasp a fleeting image? What you seek is nowhere; but turn yourself away, and the object of your love will be no more. That which you behold is but the shadow of a reflected form and has no substance of its own. With you it comes, with you it stays, and it will go with you – if you can go.”[21] Searching for his identity, by mirroring himself Narcissus is split in two: “Unwittingly he desires himself; he praises and is himself what he praises; and while he seeks, is sought; equally he kindles love and burns with love.”[22]

Finally Narcissus dies, in accordance with its destiny, finally aware of the otherness that would save him but unable to reach it, a prisoner of his identity: “Oh, I am he! I have felt it, I know now my own image. I burn with love of my own self; I both kindle the flames and suffer them. What shall I do? Shall I be wooed or woo? Why woo at all? What I desire, I have; the very abundance of my riches beggars me. Oh, that I might be parted from my own body! and, strange prayer for a lover, I would that what I love were absent from me! And now grief is sapping my strength; but a brief space of life remains to me and I am cut off in my life’s prime. Death is nothing to me, for in death I shall leave my troubles; I would he that is loved might live

[16] “sed, fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma,/ nulli illum iuvenes, nullae tetigere puellae” (III 354f.).

[17] “egressaque silva/ ibat, ut iniceret sperato bracchia collo” (III 388f.).

[18] “Ille fugit fugiensque: ‘Manus conplexibus aufer!/Ante’ ait ‘emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri!’” (III 390f.).

[19] “Sic amet ipse licet, sic non potiatur amato!” (III 405).

[20] “dumque bibit, visae correptus imagine formae/ spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod umbra est” (III 416f.).

[21] “Credule, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?/ Quod petis, est nusquam; quod amas, avertere, perdes!/ Ista repercussae, quam cernis, imaginis umbra est:/ nil habet ista sui; tecum venitque manetque;/ tecum discedet, si tu discedere possis” (III 432–436).

[22] “Se cupit inprudens et, qui probat, ipse probatur,/ dumque petit, petitur, pariterque accendit et ardet” (III 425f.).

longer; but as it is, we two shall die together in one breath."[23] So Narcissus undergoes the metamorphosis in which he perpetuates himself as the plant with two flowers.

Pausanias finds it so incredible – "totally silly" (*παντάπασιν εὔηθες*), he says[24] – that someone may think to see themselves in the reflection of a mirror, that he introduces the figure of Narcissus's twin sister, whom he loved and believes to see in the image reflected in the water.

The mirror, therefore – which in the case of the myth of Narcissus is not an artefact, but the water of a source – is far from the instance of truth about oneself; on the contrary it is the origin of illusion, of narcosis, of self-loss. The awareness of his own identity is not the supreme confirmation of the subject, but the cause of his downfall.

In the tradition of Jewish-Christian monotheism the mirror does not have a relevant meaning, as testified by the very scarce recurrences of the word in the Bible. Such recurrences, moreover, are not generally very significant. However, there is a well-known and culturally influent passage of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (13,12) that deserves careful consideration. Paul writes: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face."[25] In this passage, therefore, the mirror does not at all refer to a truthful image of what it reflects but, on the contrary, it refers to a distorted, obscure image that turns truth into an enigma. It might also depend on the different manufacturing of mirrors in ancient times, but the mirror here surely isn't the symbol of the faithful reflection of truth: rather, it is confusion, ambiguity and deceit.

Nevertheless, one could go beyond those considerations simply objecting that in this passage by Paul the mirror doesn't appear as a figure of self-knowledge, and that therefore the meaning of this symbol has nothing to do with that theme. But it isn't so: in fact, here Paul talks precisely about knowledge and self-knowledge in particular. The text goes on as follows: "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."[26] This second part clarifies the meaning of the expression "face to face:" it is not an idiomatic expression, but a precise concept – "I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." This expression reveals the concept of self-knowledge precisely in the tradition we are considering: the subject knows himself only insofar as he is known by another – God.

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[23] "Iste ego sum! sensi, nec me mea fallit imago. /Uror amore mei, flammas moveoque feroque!/ Quid faciam? Roger anne rogem? Quid deinde rogabo?/ Quod cupio, mecum est: inopem me copia fecit./ O utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!/ Votum in amante novum: vellem, quod amamus abesset!/ Iamque dolor vires adimit, nec tempora vitae/ longa meae superant, primoque exstinguor in aevo./ Nec mihi mors gravis est, posituro morte dolores:/ hic, qui diligitur, vellem diuturnior esset!/ Nunc duo concordes anima moriemur in una" (III 463–473).

[24] PAUSANIA, *Periegesis Hellados* IX, 31,7.

[25] "*βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι᾽ ἐσόπτρου ἐναἰνίγματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον*"; "Videmus enim nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem" (I Cor 13,12a).

[26] "*ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθην* "; "nunc cognosco ex parte, tunc autem cognoscam, sicut et cognitus sum" (I Cor 13,12b).

One couldn't understand the Augustinian attitude of the "confession" without making reference to this idea: I do not know myself, but God knows me; it is not by questioning myself, but by questioning God that I can know myself. It may be true that the Christian mentality develops the exercise of introspection and inner examination, but, first, it would be useful to clarify to what extent it is proper to Christian culture, or rather to what extent it is the assumption in Christianity of an attitude widespread in the Hellenistic culture. Second, it must be clear that, for Christian culture, looking into oneself does not immediately reveal oneself but rather another, God, who alone knows me and explains me to myself.

Augustine's *Confessions* are surely a very significant testimony of the Christian conception of the subject. Augustine confesses before God, but in reality the situation is not that of a subject known to himself that exposes widespread, opens up and unfolds to someone else, but rather that of a person who stands in front of another to get from Him the knowledge and explanation of himself. When Augustine quotes Paul's passage mentioned above, he comments: "I would therefore confess what I know concerning myself; I will confess also what I know not concerning myself. And because what I do know of myself, I know by Thee enlightening me; and what I know not of myself, so long I know not until the time when my 'darkness be as the noonday' in Thy sight."[27] The subject looks at himself, but he knows he will not find himself if not in another, that he will not find the truth of himself if not by recognizing it in the truth that is other than himself. Within himself, the subject finds what he is, but is not truly: his own evil, his own sin. It is only by going further that he finds what he really is, what only God knows of him, because He Himself put it in him: his own good. In fact, God is "more inward to me than my most inward part."[28] He makes myself known to myself: that is, he makes me know my evil and, more deeply, my good: "And from Thee, O Lord, unto whose eyes the depths of man's conscience are naked, what in me could be hidden though I were unwilling to confess to Thee? For so should I hide Thee from myself, not myself from Thee. But now, because my groaning witnesseth that I am dissatisfied with myself, Thou shinest forth, and satisfiest, and art beloved and desired; that I may blush for myself, and renounce myself, and choose Thee, and may neither please Thee nor myself, except in Thee. To Thee, then, O Lord, am I manifest, whatever I am, and with what fruit I may confess unto Thee I have spoken. Nor do I it with words and sounds of the flesh, but with the words of the soul, and that cry of reflection which Thine ear knoweth. For when I am wicked, to confess to Thee is naught but to be dissatisfied with myself; but when I am truly devout, it is naught but not to attribute it to myself, because Thou, O Lord, dost 'bless the righteous;' but first Thou justifiest him 'ungodly.' My confession, therefore, O my God, in Thy sight, is made unto Thee

[27] "Confitear ergo quid de me sciam, confitear et quid de me nesciam, quoniam et quod de me scio, te mihi lucente scio, et quod de me nescio, tandiu nescio, donec fiant tenebrae meae sicut meridies in vultu tuo" (X 5,7). This passage and the following are taken from: *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin, with a Sketch of his Life and Work*, by Philip Schaff, Christian Classics Ethereal Library-Christian Literature Publishing Co., Grand Rapids (MI)-New York 1886.

[28] "interior intimo meo" (III 6,11).

silently, and yet not silently. For in noise it is silent, in affection it cries aloud. For neither do I give utterance to anything that is right unto men which Thou hast not heard from me before, nor dost Thou hear anything of the kind from me which Thyself saidst not first unto me."[29]

This setting, entirely characteristic of the confession, founds such a powerful and effective method that it cannot compare with any method developed by psychoanalysis. Augustine is looking for evil in him and in this search he can – not in his memory but in the wisdom of God – go up not only to his childhood, but also to his prenatal time.[30]

I cannot dwell any longer on the examination of Augustine's complex work, so I will limit myself to highlighting a few characteristics of the subject here, which might be useful as a comparison with the general theme I am analysing. First of all, this self-knowledge that is built when confessing before God is certainly a judgment ("it is Thou, Lord, that judgest me"),[31] but it is a judgment for salvation, not for the subject's condemnation; it is for their confirmation, not their negation: "Who am I, and what is my nature? How evil have not my deeds been; or if not my deeds, my words; or if not my words, my will? But Thou, O Lord, art good and merciful, and Thy right hand had respect unto the profoundness of my death, and removed from the bottom of my heart that abyss of corruption."[32] For this reason, Augustine's introspection, which brings to light all his miseries, is still calm and serene: "O my God, – in whose presence I can now with security recall this,"[33] "'What shall I render unto the Lord,' that whilst my memory recalls these things my soul is not appalled at them?"[34] This introspection is not a heroic test for strong souls, but a way of clarity for the weak and fragile subject: "Let, then, the strong and the mighty laugh at us, but let us who are 'poor and needy' confess unto Thee."[35] Finally, it is important to note that the subject who here investigates herself does not discover her

[29] "Et tibi quidem, Domine, cuius oculis nuda est abyssus humanae conscientiae, quid occultum esset in me, etiamsi nollem confiteri tibi? Te enim mihi absconderem, non me tibi. Nunc autem quod gemitus meus testis est displicere me mihi, tu refulges et places et amaris et desideraris, ut erubescam de me et abiciam me atque eligam te et nec tibi nec mihi placeam nisi de te. Tibi ergo, Domine, manifestus sum, quicumque sim. Et quo fructu tibi confitear, dixi. Neque id ago verbis carnis et vocibus, sed verbis animae et clamore cogitationis, quem novit auris tua. Cum enim malus sum, nihil est aliud confiteri tibi quam displicere mihi; cum vero pius, nihil est aliud confiteri tibi quam hoc non tribuere mihi quoniam tu, Domine, benedicis iustum, sed prius eum iustificas impium. Confessio itaque mea, Deus meus, in conspectu tuo tibi tacite fit et non tacite. Tacet enim strepitu, clamat affectu. Neque enim dico recti aliquid hominibus, quod non a me tu prius audieris, aut etiam tu aliquid tale audis a me, quod non mihi tu prius dixeris" (X 2,2).

[30] Cf. I 6f.

[31] "Tu enim, Domine, diiudicas me" (X 5,7).

[32] "Quis ego et qualis ego? Quid non mali aut facta mea aut, si non facta, dicta mea aut, si non dicta, voluntas mea fuit? Tu autem, Domine, bonus et misericors et dextera tua respiciens profunditatem mortis meae et a fundo cordis mei exhauriens abyssum corruptionis" (IX 1,1).

[33] "Deus meus, in cuius conspectu iam secura est recordatio mea" (I 16,26).

[34] "Quid retribuam Domino, quod recolit haec memoria mea et anima mea non metuit inde?" (II 7,15).

[35] "irrideant nos fortes et potentes, nos autem infirmi et inopes confiteamur tibi" (IV 1,1).

identity, but on the contrary, her dispersion, crushing, wandering, that only God can redeem: “when Thou art poured forth on us, Thou art not cast down, but we are uplifted; nor art Thou dissipated, but we are drawn together;”[36] “Cramped is the dwelling of my soul; do Thou expand it, that Thou mayest enter in. It is in ruins, restore Thou it.”[37] The subject – stretched and broken in time, and therefore in memory, one could say in the psyche – recognizes this insuperable condition, and places only in God, who is above time, the hope of her recollection in unity: “But now are my years spent in mourning. And Thou, O Lord, art my comfort, my Father everlasting. But I have been divided amid times (*in tempora dissilui*), the order of which I know not; and my thoughts, even the inmost bowels of my soul, are mangled (*dilaniantur*) with tumultuous varieties, until I flow together (*confluam*) unto Thee, purged and molten (*liquidus*) in the fire of Thy love.”[38]

Let’s come now to our present situation. It seems to me clear and irrefutable that today the bourgeois concept of conscience, although still widespread in costume, is now culturally a dry branch, which sooner or later is bound to fall, and which even today does not bear any fruit. Its sap was dried up by the repeated denunciation of its illusory, deceptive, and completely unreliable nature. As Paul Ricoeur analytically and convincingly showed, in his work *Le conflit des interpretations,*[39] the “masters of suspicion,” Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, have now thoroughly exposed the mystification of consciousness and inaugurated an era in which we cannot and must not give any more credit to it. At the beginning of his text Ricoeur briefly sums up this thesis, which he analytically develops later: “It must be stated, first, that the celebrated Cartesian *cogito*, which grasps itself directly in the experience of doubt, is a truth as vain as it is invincible. I do not deny that it is a truth; it is a truth which posits itself (…). But this truth is a vain truth; it is like a first step which cannot be followed by any other, so long as the *ego* of the *ego cogito* has not been recaptured in the mirror of its objects, of its works, and, finally, of its acts. Reflection is blind intuition if it is not mediated by what Dilthey called the expression in which life objectifies itself (…) reflection is nothing other than the appropriation of our act of existing by means of a critique applied to the works and the acts which are the signs of this act of existing.

The cogito is not only a truth as vain as it is invincible; we must add, as well, that it is like an empty place which has, from all time, been occupied by a false cogito. We have indeed learned, from all the exegetic disciplines and from psychoanalysis in particular, that so-called immediate consciousness is first of all ‘false

[36] “Et cum effunderis super nos, non tu iaces, sed erigis nos, nec tu dissiparis, sed colligis nos” (I 3,3).

[37] “Angusta est domus animae meae, quo venias ad eam: dilatetur abs te. Ruinosa est: refice eam” (I 5,6).

[38] “Nunc vero anni mei in gemitibus, et tu solacium meum, Domine, pater meus aeternus es; at ego in tempora dissilui, quorum ordinem nescio, et tumultuosis varietatibus dilaniantur cogitationes meae, intima viscera animae meae, donec in te confluam purgatus et liquidus igne amoris tui” (XI 29,39).

[39] P. RICOEUR, *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d’herméneutique*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1969.

consciousness:’ Marx, Nietzsche and Freud have taught us to unmask its tricks. Henceforth it becomes necessary to join a critique of false consciousness to any rediscovery of the subject of the cogito in the documents of its life; a philosophy of reflection must be just the opposite of a philosophy of consciousness.”[40]

In the Buddenbrook family there is a person who, albeit with difficulty and suffering, escapes the mystification and oppression of bourgeois consciousness. It is Hanno Buddenbrooks, Thomas’s young son. Hanno is a weak child, fragile, insecure, prone to sadness and crying. He painfully bears the angry obstinacy of his father Thomas, who, wishing to temper his character, inflicts upon him intentional frustrations and humiliations.[41] Hanno senses that the way to himself cannot be the arrogant building of an identical and strong-willed self, but rather that of wandering in the events and experiences that involve him. For this reason he is fascinated by music and theatre. His passion for theatre is poorly tolerated by his father and, in some way, is even censured by his uncle Christian, who, despite knowing the charm of theatre, sees his own failure repeated in his nephew: “his pleasure in the toy theatre was as unaffected as Hanno’s own,”[42] and yet warns him: “Listen, son – take my advice: don’t think too much about such things – theatre, and that sort of thing. It’s no good. Believe your old uncle, I’ve always spent too much time on them, and that is why I haven’t come to much good.”[43]

Music is where Hanno manages to free his desire and realize his search for meaning. His mother and his music teacher, the organist Edmund Pfühl, support him in this task. Gerda Buddenbrook, Hanno’s mother, knows from personal experience that music is a restless search, a *Sehnsucht* that rejects the peace of form which is too easily achieved and accomplished, and instead chooses wandering in multiplicity and the metamorphosis of form, because it knows that this scattering of identity harbours the sense of understanding and the adventure of the subject. She reacts to her husband Thomas’s critical observations, on “this constant harping on musical values,”[44] with harsh words on the “banal”[45] tendency to stick to the safe identity of form, possessed as a stable and reassuring commodity: “you will never understand anything about music as an art, and, intelligent as you are, you will never see that it is more than an after-dinner pleasure and a feast for the ears (…). What pleases you in music? A sort of insipide optimisme (…). Easy gratification of each unformed wish, prompt satisfaction before the will is even roused – that is what pretty music is like – and it is like nothing else in the world. It is mere flabby idealism.”[46]

Hanno, instead, seeks in music infinite wandering, the modulation between tonalities, the experience of ever-changing and disparate auditory and sentimental events, in a development that aims to be infinite and that lasts as long as possible,

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 21f.; Eng. trans, cit, pp. 17f.

[41] Cf. Th. MANN, *op. cit.*, pp. 484ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 375ff.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 538; Eng. trans. cit., p. 415.

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 538f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 415.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 509; Eng. trans. cit., p. 394.

[45] *Ibidem*.

[46] *Ibidem*.

postponing the solution. Mr. Pfuhl understands and encourages him: “Sometimes I look into his eyes, and see so much lying there – but he holds his mouth tight shut. In later life, when his mouth will probably be shut even tighter, he must have some kind of outlet – a way of speaking –.”[47] In fact, Hanno speaks, improvising on the piano and experiencing in this improvisation a veritable *Bildungsroman*: “And now began a ceaseless hurry of events whose sense and meaning could not be guessed, a restless flood of sound-adventures, rhythms, harmonies, welling up uncontrolled from the keyboard, as they shaped themselves under Hanno’s labouring fingers. He experienced them, as it were; he did not know them beforehand.”[48]

This path forms a subject that is very different from the arrogant and deceitful identity of bourgeois consciousness: a broken subject, dispersed in the multiplicity of events and experiences, but a subject that is actually interested in truth and involved in it. To return to the metaphor of the mirror and the image, with which I started these considerations, we can dwell a little on the experience of the observer in front of the wonderful painting *Las Meninas*, painted by Diego Velázquez in 1656. As is known, Michel Foucault masterfully commented on it in his book *Les mots et les choses.*[49] Foucault’s and John Searle’s[50] interpretations have triggered an intense debate.[51] Here, however, I want to observe it so as to find an example of the subject’s wandering off itself to attain better self-conscience.

Placing herself in front of Velázquez’s painting, the observer first sees Margarita, the Infanta of Spain, flanked by her bridesmaids, Doña Maria Agustina de Sarmiento and Doña Isabel de Velasco, so that these figures give the title to the picture. Therefore, this is the portrait of the Infanta of Spain, which I am observing and which observes me, returning the gaze. This figure is immediately obvious, being a front figure, built exactly on the vertical axis of the canvas and in full light. As is the case in general with portraits, I find myself involved in the experience of observing and being observed. Each of us knows that observing and being observed are intense experiences, capable of moving of changing us: I’m not talking here of the attitude of the philosopher, a disinterested spectator of Pythagorean memory, but of the involved observer, of “watching” and “being watched” – a relationship that, as we learn from the myth of Narcissus, has something to do with a love that transforms us.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 502; Eng. trans. cit., p. 389.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 749; Eng. trans. cit., p. 579.

[49] M. FOUCAULT, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Gallimard, Paris 1966, pp. 19–31; Eng. trans., Routledge, London and New York 2002, pp. 3–18.

[50] J. R. SEARLE, *Las Meninas and the paradoxes of pictorial representation*, in “Critical Inquiry,” 6, n. 3 (Spring, 1980), pp. 477–488.

[51] Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen’s critique was particularly influent (*Reflexions on “Las Meninas:” Paradox Lost*, in “Critical Inquiry,” 7, n. 2 (Winter, 1980), pp. 429–447.

However, as soon as this exchange of glances with the Infanta of Spain is established, it becomes immediately destabilizing, due to a disturbing element: the girl looks at me, and yet at the same time her gaze goes beyond me, looking at something or someone behind me. The subject, confirmed by being observed, is at once questioned by being passed by the gaze of the observer. Thus begins a strange and thrilling adventure of the subject, destined to go through him and to reveal him in all his diversity and difference. In fact, other characters in the picture also look at me and at the same time pass me by with their eyes. The painter, Velázquez, has placed himself in the scene, broken into different pieces through the artificial multiplication of his name: in fact, he portrays himself as a painter, to the left of the scene, but refers to his own name also in the maid on the right of the Infanta, Dona Isabel de

Velasco, and in the marshal of the palace, Don José Nieto Velázquez, portrayed in the back. The painter, therefore, is painting a picture – which is imposed to our gaze in its bulky materiality, as it occupies the whole left side of the canvas – and is staring intensively at his object. What figure is taking shape on his canvas, we do not know, because we do not see it. Perhaps the canvas is still empty, but certainly what he observes and wants to represent is not the Infanta of Spain, who turns her back to him. In fact, even the painter is looking at me and at the same time is watching, over me, someone else. Likewise, both the dwarf in the foreground – one of the minor figures on the right of the canvas – and the Infanta’s dog at the dwarf’s feet are looking at me and behind me. I, the observer, am thus made aware not only that I am involved in the scene I am looking at (which happens in observing many other paintings), but also that this scene overcomes me, goes on behind my back, referring me to something further away that transcends me and that I ignore. The scene which now I am part of loses its boundaries, it extends into a space behind me, which I do not see, I do not know, of which I ignore the limits – in fact, it could be unlimited. And in front of me, at the back of the room, a door opens onto another real space, structured by a staircase and at the same made indefinite by a background light that illuminates and hides its limits, from which a black, enigmatic, figure – also a portrait – observes everything and everybody. Who is being observed? Me? Someone else behind me?

Now my gaze focuses on a mirror and on an image reflected by it. Even if I only see it now, this mirror and this image are highlighted. Centrally located, the mirror reflects a portrait, clear, crisp, pervaded by an autonomous light: the image of King Philip IV of Spain and his wife Marianna of Austria, Queen of Spain. A queen in the mirror, again! Behind me, unseen by me but observed by all my companions on the scene, there are the King and Queen of Spain.[52] They are being observed and at the same time they are the ones that serenely observe all. In the mirror appears the subject that I do not see and that, at the same time, is the most real subject: the one that everyone observes and that observes all. And this subject is dual, the king and the queen! At the back of the scene, as I mentioned, there is the only person who is not fully participating in the scene itself. The observer’s black figure looks into the room through an open door, but is in another room and seems about to take a staircase, despite also standing still in a portrait pose.

This painting, like all great works of art, is inexhaustible and our wanderings in it could continue without end. In 1957 Pablo Picasso went 58 times through this painting, producing the beautiful set of variations on it. However it seems to me that at this point we can already say that the subject who dwelt in it and went through it is enriched with multiple and diverse meanings, which certainly do not help

[52] It seems to me that Snyder and Cohen’s argument that the original of the portrait of the two real characters is on the canvas in front of the painter is far from proven and irrefutable, as many have taken it to be; on the contrary, I believe there are many important reasons that make it unlikely. On the contrary, the presence of the two august persons behind us is perceived as intensely as the other characters of the picture sense it.

reinforce his identity, but on the contrary, drive and invite him (literally) to be open to difference.

Therefore, there is no one subject: the subject is many, other, different, broken. It is in the making, in a narrative, that is, in a chronological series of events. However there is no denying the subject’s function of collecting and selecting those events. The flutter of the wings of a butterfly in the Amazon forest does not belong to my I, or in any case it does not belong to it as directly as my friendship with Professor Flach or my rheumatism. The I is not a function of identity, nor is it a coherence function, but it is still a function of collection and selection of events. Herein lies the serious problem of teleology. How is the series of events that constitutes me selected? And, secondly, is this series a chronicle or a story?

Many today deny any meaning to finality. If this denial is a thesis on reality, it is certainly true, but it is also marked by the major limitation of the empirical propositions. Certainly the end is not a matter of fact, but it has never claimed to be; on the contrary it has always configured itself as a meaning beyond the facts, as an interpretation of them. If this denial is an epistemological argument, then it means the rejection of systematic knowledge, closely connected with epistemological anti-humanism, as Michel Foucault’s position demonstrates.

Modern culture believed it could recognize an end in the events and therefore a story in them, and it also believed to know what this end was. For this reason the modern subject is still a firmly historical subject. Today we are no longer sure of seeing and knowing the end and therefore, for us, even the conscience of the subject is less solid and secure. However even if the end is unseen and unknown, it can be searched, waited and hoped for. Paul Ricoeur speaks of “consciousness as a task,”[53] which seems to me still too optimistic for the current lack of any orientation and any security. But he also speaks of “hope,” which indeed is one of his main themes. It seems to me that the hope for an end – or, as I put it elsewhere, the “*Sehnsucht* of the form”[54] – is already sufficient reason to build the subject, to collect and select the events, while renouncing to organize them in identity or coherence. The hope of the subject is the subject; the heart is broken, but it yearns for unity: precisely by radically and faithfully experiencing its dispersion, it experiences the *Sehnsucht* of his own form. I think that this fundamental experience is similar to the biblical one that is philosophically commented on in the already mentioned passage of Augustine’s *Confessions* (XI 29,39): “a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (*ein gebrochenes, zerschlagenes Herz,/Gott,du wirst nicht verschmähen*) (Sl 51,19b)[55]; “Create in me a pure heart, o God” (*Ein reines Herzschaffe mir, Gott*) (Sl 51,12a).

[53] P. RICOUER, *op. cit.*, p. 109. See the whole paragraph (pp. 109–121).

[54] Cf. *supra*, Theme I, Cadence 1.

[55] For this verse and the next I also cited the German translation by Martin Buber (M. BUBER, *Die Schriftwerke*, Band 4., 6. Auflage der neubearbeiteten Ausgabe von 1962, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 81 and 80.

Theme III

> Well, then. At the end of the earth stands a high mountain; on the top of this mountain is a huge boulder, and out of the boulder flows a stream of clear water. At the opposite end of the earth is the heart of the world. Now each thing in the world has a heart, and the world itself has a great heart of its own. And the heart of the world keeps the clear stream ever in sight, gazing at it with insatiable longing and desire. But the heart of the world can make not even one step toward it, for the moment it stirs from its place, it loses sight of the mountain's summit and the crystal spring. And if, though for a single instant only, it loses sight of the spring, it loses in that same moment its life, and the heart of the world begins to die. The crystal spring has no life-span of its own, but endures only so long as the heart of the world allows. And this is one day only. Now at the close of day, the spring calls to the heart of the world in a song and is answered in a song from the heart. And the sound of their song passes over all the earth, and out of it shining threads come forth and fasten onto the hearts of all the world's creatures and from one heart to another. There is a righteous and benevolent man, who goes to and from over all the earth's surface, gathering up the threads from all the hearts. These he weaves into Time, and when he has woven one whole day, he passes it over to the heart of the world, which passes it over to the crystal spring, and so the spring achieves another day of life.

(Š. AN-SḴI, *The Dybbuk or Between Two Worlds;* Eng. trans. H.G. Alsberg, adapted from the Habima Production; cit. Act III).

Cadenza 1
The Ethical Difference
Wisdom Under the Sun and Wisdom of the Heart

The distinction between nature and ethics is easily and straightforwardly recognisable in the difference between what is and what ought to be: such a definition is widely supported, almost like a platitude. However, generally accepted definitions and principles risk no longer undergoing discussion and critique, so that their meaning blurs and fades into the rituality of a premise that almost no longer belongs to philosophical discourse as its foundation and constituent element.

Luckily, in this particular case this risk is lower: in fact, despite the previously mentioned definition being widely accepted, throughout the history of philosophical thought there has always been a strong line of criticism against it, represented by the several philosophies that from time to time opposed either one or the other term of the distinction, that is, either nature or ethics. It would be verbose and unnecessarily laborious to list all the philosophies that negated the sense of an Ought-to-be that is different from, lies beyond and transcends the Being, and that reduced the whole sphere of sense and the whole explanation of meanings to natural phenomena and processes. The list of all the philosophies that negated nature would not be any shorter, if by "nature" one means the object of modern science, that is, a series of phenomena determined a priori according to laws. Indeed, one should include in this list: on the one hand, all the positions representing epistemological scepticism of an empiricist nature, which consider natural reality and its laws as "matters of fact" (the typical English expression is here particularly fitting) and thus deprive the concept of "nature" of any meaning and reduce it to a mere collective noun; on the other hand, all the positions that challenge modern natural science in the name of a representation, or sometimes an evocation of nature as a dream or a vision of the transcendent Being, which reveals to or conceals itself from (or both at the same time) the intellectual intuition of the subject, called from time to time spirit or *Dasein* or something else, which has nothing to do with scientific reason.

A. Poma, *Cadenzas*, Studies in German Idealism 18,
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I believe that these positions, considered as a whole, force one to constantly bear in mind and keep alive the critical reflection about the definition of the difference between Being and Ought-to-be, not because of their explicit intention of negating either term of the distinction, but because in doing this they reach – in general – an identity that eventually deprives both terms of their original meaning. In other words, if I am allowed to use a generalisation that should be tempered by a deeper analysis of the single positions (which greatly differ from each other), the result of the philosophies that negate ethics – and therefore the Ought-to-be – just like of those that negate nature (that is, Being meant as the object of science) is the affirmation of an undifferentiated identity, which is called and defined in several ways, but has nothing to do with either term of the distinction I am referring to.

If true, this consideration appears relevant to me, because it sheds light on the real meaning of the relationship between Being and Ought-to-be, which is not a mere distinction of two terms, in which one could be negated while keeping the other, but rather a real difference that the Ought-to-be creates in Being, so that a correlation is established in which the sense of Ought-to-be is nothing but its difference from Being, and the sense of Being cannot be reduced to an identity with itself, but is constitutively tied to this difference. This is the reason why it is impossible to negate one term of the difference without negating the other as well: because both terms gain sense and meaning from the difference itself: one (Ought-to-be) because it is this difference, the other (Being) because the difference is part of it just like its always-immanent transcendence.

Going through the tradition of critical idealism, in which the difference between Being and Ought-to-be is constantly thematised, several formulations of what has been said before come to the surface, from the famous expression with which Plato defines good, *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβείᾳ κάι δυνάμει*,[1] to the equally famous definition by Kant, in the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, according to which "a practical philosophy doesn't commit itself to explanations of what *happens*, but to laws about what *ought to happen* even if it never does."[2] The continuity between Kant's and Plato's positions is manifest and in several passages also becomes explicit through Kant's clearly Platonic terminological choices – think for example of the Kantian definition of the relationship between the moral Ought-to-be as "*natura archetypa*" and the natural Being as "*natura ectypa*."[3]

This correlation between Being and Ought-to-be, which is not a mere distinction, but rather a true difference made in Being by Ought-to-be, that is the Ought-to-be as a difference *of* Being, is explained in a particularly fitting way by Hermann Cohen in *Ethik des reinen Willens*.[4] In the *Einleitung* of this work, after underlining the importance of the distinction between Being and Ought-to-be in order to establish

[1] PLATO, *The Republic* 509b.

[2] I. KANT, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 4., p. 427.

[3] Cf. I. KANT, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 5., p. 43; Eng. trans. M. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 39.

[4] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, in IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Bd. 7, Georg Olms, Hildesheim–New York 1981.

clearly and definitely the autonomy of ethics from natural science, after pointing out the importance of the fact that Being is methodological prior to the Ought-to-be, since logic supplies the rational method that also ethics must follow, Cohen perfects the formula "Being and Ought-to-be," pointing out that it would be more precise to talk about "the Being of the Ought-to-be" rather than of Ought-to-be, because "the distinction from Being can never deprive the Ought-to-be of the value of Being; it can never exclude the Ought-to-be from Being."[5]

With these brief considerations I hope I have outlined the topic I intend to dwell on: the relationship between nature and ethics, between Being and Ought-to-be, meant not as a mere distinction of research fields, but as a constituent difference in Being, by means of which Being always transcends itself and the transcendence of the Ought-to-be is always immanent in Being. Now I would like to analyse this topic in a text that does not belong to philosophy, but I believe can offer some interesting food for thought: the book of Qohelet. Although I certainly do not have the philological and theological skills for a scientific reading of this text, I hope I will be forgiven for the freedom with which I unpretentiously question it to retrieve some confirmations of the philosophical considerations I have made above.

The book of Qohelet is generally considered a moralistic text, and actually it belongs to the Wisdom Books of the Bible and contains a rich collection of moral maxims. Traditionally, it is often regarded with embarrassment as the expression of a moral scepticism that clashes with the teaching of the Bible as a whole. Contrarily to this interpretation, several scholars set out to recognise the religious and authentically moral background of this text. But if one reads the first chapter of this book, without anticipating, contextualising and justifying what it contains, it appears to me one faces a position that is far more radical than any kind of scepticism: a real negation of any sense of reality, in which even the distinction between the sphere of natural phenomena and the sphere of human actions is negated.

The famous and rather authoritative opening: "Nothing but evanescence, says Qohelet, nothing but evanescence; all is evanescence" (1,2)[6] is followed by an undifferentiated list of natural and human events, which all keep on repeat themselves identically in an eternal return. The constant succession of generations, the repetition of the solar cycle, the continuous spinning and turning of the wind, the flow of the rivers towards the sea and then again to the spring, the constant and never-ending labour of mankind: all these things are perfectly identical and equally vain, because "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun" (1,9).

"Under the sun," elsewhere Qohelet writes that there is nothing new "under the heaven." "The earth endures forever" (1,4b) and upon it all events, natural phenomena and human actions flow, in an eternal return in which there is neither memory nor newness. Nothing is new, because no matter what happens, what actions one takes, it has already happened, it has already been carried out in the past: "There is

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[6] All the quotations from the Book of Qohelet are taken from the translation on Chabad.org., but amending the translation of "הֶבֶל" as "evanescence" (cf. *infra*, p. 136).

a thing of which [someone] will say, 'See this, it is new.' It has already been for ages which were before us" (1,10).

"Under the sun," where everything keeps coming back identical, where there is no newness, there is not even the memory of what has happened or has been done, because the eternal return of the same excludes the peculiarity and the singularity of the event and therefore also of the subject that carries it out. In the undifferentiated and indifferent identity nobody, nothing is new, singular, different, and therefore there is no specific memory of anything or anyone: "there is no remembrance of former [generations], neither will the later ones that will be have any remembrance among those that will be afterwards." (1,11).

So the chapter ends with a coherent consequence: if nothing makes sense, if everything is equally evanescent, then even knowing the wisdom of what is under the sun is not different from knowing folly and stupidity, it can only cause more stress and pain, because if everything is evanescence, even knowledge of this all is evanescence: "I know that this too is evanescence" (1,17b).

In such a situation, not only the possibility of certain knowledge of what is good and what is bad is negated, as moral scepticism requires; much more radically, any space for ethics (that is, for the Ought-to-be) is negated, because everything is equally and indiscriminately a repetition of anonymous events, which are fleeting even if they are recurrent, indeed fleeting because they are recurrent, lacking any relevance or difference: they are never new, always already happened and forgotten.

So men cannot foster any ethical aspiration "under the sun." None of their actions, none of their efforts, none of their results have sense in the ethical perspective of realising something "good," that brings to the world the newness of having made something that was not there before but deserves to be there, and that gives its author the honour and recognition of being remembered in the memories of posterity. Qohelet sets out to seek "which is better for the children of men that they should do under the heavens, the number of the days of their lives" (2,3b), but whatever the direction, joy, pleasure, wisdom, richness, power, justice, in the end they have to admit, as he repeats in the conclusion of his considerations: "Nothing but evanescence, (...) all is evanescence" (12,8).

So why refer to this text in a reflection that aims at indicating the difference of ethics, that is the difference of the Ought-to-be in Being? Why refer to a text that, as has been seen till now, maintains exactly the opposite: that there is no difference and therefore no sense in the reality of anything that happens "under the sun;" that there is no newness nor memory, but only an eternal repetition of the same, in which nothing really becomes, but everything remains what it is; that there is nothing eternal, not even the return of the same, because in that repetitive permanence what happens vanishes in the monotonous series of repetitions instead of being kept in the memory of its newness?

The answer to this question lies in another topic dealt with in the Book of Qohelet. In fact, in the third chapter of the Book the tone is completely different. It opens with the famous passage in which Qohelet recognises that "there is a time for every matter under the heaven" (3,1b): this is made explicit in the next few lines,

which point out that there is a right and appropriate time to carry out a human action or its opposite (see 3, 2–8). This passage introduces an important new element: there is not only the undifferentiated repetition of events under the sun, but men can and must see a עֵת, a right and appropriate time (a *καιρός*, as the LXX translate) to carry out an action or to refrain from it. This is a consequence and a sign of a more fundamental truth: God "has made everything beautiful in its time" (3,11a). This profession of faith completely overturns the desolate situation that was previously described. In the light of this truth, what is under the sun is not merely an identical, senseless repetition of events whose fleetingness crumbles into the oblivion of the undifferentiated; on the contrary, everything is and happens according to an eternal and total divine plan, in which also and above all the actions of men have an important sense, if they can grasp the right time and way to take them: an appropriate and therefore specific time, which, if seized and nurtured by men, makes their action unique and unrepeatable, actually new and worthy of memory. As is evident, here begins the ethical dimension: the perspective on reality as it ought to be.

Then why, in his search for the wisdom under the sun, has Qohelet found nothing but the non-sense of the eternal return and of the undifferentiated? Because the ethical perspective – which is not a different reality from the one "under the sun," but a different way of reading, interpreting, living and therefore transforming the same reality, recognising its sense and contributing with one's own actions to make it real – escapes mundane wisdom and can be considered as, though not understood as another kind of wisdom, which Qohelet (as generally does the Bible) calls "fear of God." It is no esoterical or mystical wisdom to which men must sacrifice their intellect and their reason. It is rather using those faculties in a way that, instead of shutting itself in the mere reading of what is "under the sun," tries to understand the reality within its limits but in the light of knowledge of the limits themselves: this is Qohelet's religious view, but it is also the ethical perspective of the introduction of the difference of the Ought-to-be in the Being.

This kind of knowledge has its own peculiar movement, which Qohelet describes in an extremely elliptical manner in verses 11 and 14 of the third chapter, and which I will here try to explain more extensively. In 3,11 Qohelet writes: "He has made everything beautiful in its time; also the idea of the perfected whole He put into their hearts, save that man should not find the deed which God did, from beginning to end;" in 3,14 he adds: "I knew that everything that God made, that will be forever; we cannot add to it, nor can we subtract from it; and God made it so that they fear Him." In these verses there are several elements that, taken all together, form a final framework.

First of all, what is "under the sun" is not a mere senseless repetition of events, but, as a whole and in its details, what God created according to a "beautiful" plan, that is a plan that has a form and makes sense. This is undoubtedly a profession of faith from Qohelet, because human wisdom "under the sun" cannot come as far as to see this plan of God, which eternally creates and arranges everything under the sun, and which, however, is not "under the sun:" it is transcendent.

Secondly, God put "הָעֹלָם," the eternal whole, in the heart of men. This word is only used here in the Bible as an objective accusative (אֶת-הָעֹלָם), and while it is normally interpreted as a time indicator like in Qohelet 1,4 – where he says that the Earth endures "forever" (לְעוֹלָם) – here it is widely interpreted as the concept of a spatial-temporal whole.[7] In the heart of men there is the idea of an eternal whole that is full of sense: even if men cannot see and understand this whole in its parts and in its becoming, neither can they silence what Ilaria Bertone (in my opinion trying to find a term to render the untranslatable German word "*Sehnsucht*") rightfully calls the "yearning" and the "longing" for the sense of the whole.[8] Men cannot "discover" the analytical sense of this idea, but their "heart," that is their whole spirit, theoretical, practical and sentimental reason, takes them back to this "presence of an absence" and allows them with good reason on the one hand to believe in God's good plan that governs reality; on the other hand, consequently, to see what is under the sun with new, different eyes. This wisdom is not superhuman or mystical, but fully human and rational, and nevertheless it is different from the wisdom "under the sun," because it is a wisdom "in the heart of men," which does interpret and understand the very things that are "under the sun," but in the light of the *Sehnsucht* which lies in the heart of men: that wisdom is called "fear of God."

Thirdly, men, enriched by this new wisdom, can interpret and understand the events of the world trusting their sense and acting to realise it. Although the realistic and disenchanted observation of reality remains, they can introduce the critique of the Ought-to-be in Being, both as faith and as commitment. This is the reason why in the next verses Qohelet writes: "And moreover, I saw under the sun, [in] the place of justice, there is wickedness, and [in] the place of righteousness, there is wickedness. I said to myself, 'God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every deed there'" (3,16–17). And a few

[7] The interpretation of the meaning and therefore the translation of this term are currently being discussed by several experts. O. LORETZ, *Qohelet und der Alte Orient. Untersuchungen zu Stil und theologischer Thematik des Buches Qohelet*, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1964, pp. 281ff. gives an overview of the various interpretations. E. JENNI, *Das Wort 'ōlām im Alten Testament*, in "Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft," 64 (1952), pp. 197–248; 65 (1953), pp. 1–35 offers an in-depth analysis of the usage and meanings of this term in the Bible. Jenni is also the author of the entry "עֹלָם" in E. JENNI – C. WESTERMANN, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Kaiser Verlag – Theologischer Verlag, München – Zürich 1971-1976/ E. JENNI – C. WESTERMANN, *Dizionario teologico dell'Antico Testamento* (Kaiser Verlag – Theologischer Verlag, München – Zürich 1971–1976), Marietti, Casale Monferrato 1978–1982, vol. II, coll. 206–219.

I have chosen "the perfected whole" over the interpretation given by Paolo Sacchi, who translates it as "a certain overview" (cf, *Ecclesiaste*, version, introduction, notes by Paolo Sacchi, Edizioni Paoline, Rome 1971, p. 142) and that given by Virgilio Melchiorre, who translates it as "the sense of eternity," "the sense of wholeness" (cf. V. MELCHIORRE, *Il conflitto trascendentale in Qohelet*, in *Qohelet: letture e prospettive*, ed. by E. I. Rambaldi, with the collaboration of P. Pozzi, Franco Angeli, Milano 2006, p. 108).

[8] Cf. I. BERTONE, *Il termine* הֶבֶל *: vanità o caducità? Appunti per una storia dell'interpretazione*, in "Henoch," 26, n. 3, December 2004, p. 335.

lines below he writes: "And I saw that there is nothing better than that man rejoice in his deeds, for that is his portion, for who will bring him to see what will be after him?" (3,22).

The wisdom of the heart does not substitute mundane wisdom, but it integrates it with an essential component: the ethical component, by means of which one recognises that the knowledge of what is is enhanced and acquires a deeper sense only in the light of what ought to be. For Qohelet the true, complete wisdom is the same that is indicated elsewhere in the Bible: the fear of God (see 3,14) and doing good (see 3,12). The fear of God is the *Sehnsucht* of Being as it ought to be, "beautiful," which has form and is full of sense, as God created it: it is the ability to believe in it even without seeing it. Doing good is for man to "rejoice in his deeds, for that is his portion" (3,22). This all makes sense, and is part of the sense of the whole, of that "beautiful" plan that is fulfilled also in the deeds of men. In this perspective the wise man still sees that "under the sun" "[in] the place of justice, there is wickedness, and [in] the place of righteousness, there is wickedness" (3.16), but to himself ("to myself": 3,17) he can say: "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every deed there" (3,17).

With his wisdom under the sun, Qohelet observes with disappointment the indifference of everything that happens, and wonders: "which is better for the children of men that they should do under the heavens, the number of the days of their lives" (2,3b), but he concludes that everything is indifferent, because everything is equally forgotten and ends with death (see 3,15–16). This makes him hate life, abhor everything under the sun and despair of everything he himself accomplished with toil (see 2,17–20). But with the wisdom of the heart he knows that nevertheless there is a sense in everything that exists, which is not its mere existing, but the critical judgement and the comparison with what it ought to be: "For a sinner does evil a hundred [years], and He grants him an extension; but I know too that it will be good for those who fear God because they fear Him. But it will not be well with the wicked, and he will not prolong [his] days, like a shadow, because he does not fear God" (8,12–13).

Even the concerns about the fleetingness of what men do are overcome in the perspective of the wisdom of the heart, because "God seeks the pursued" (3,15). The deeds of justice and good performed by men are also evanescent, as any other event under the sun, but they acquire a permanent sense in their involvement in the divine plan, and this permanent sense is given back to men, not in the form of mundane memory and permanent remembrance under the sun, but in the form of the joy of the heart: "For let him remember that the days of his life are not many, for God is testimony of the joy of his heart" (5,19).

So the gift of God for the moral commitment of the man of *Sehnsucht* is not a never-ending remembrance among men, but the joy of the heart; it is no otherworldly pleasure, no mystical experience: it is an event among many others, "nothing but evanescence" just like everything else. But if it is enjoyed with the serenity of a heart that fulfils or at least strives to fulfil its moral responsibility, it can be recognised and enjoyed as a "gift of God," the gift that pleases those who are aware

that הָעֹלָם, which God wanted "beautiful" from the beginning, comes true through the evanescence of their deeds and efforts.

In this regard, I believe there are still two brief considerations to make.

First, the acknowledgment that everything is evanescence is and remains valid, so much so that Qohelet reaffirms it at the end of his meditation. Although Being cannot be reduced to identity, but is enriched by the difference of the Ought-to-be, although the apparent indifference between good and evil, between right and wrong, is revealed as false by the wisdom of the heart in the critical light of the Ought-to-be, all things, even man's good and just deeds, are evanescence. But this characteristic fleetingness has no morally negative connotation.[9] This is the reason why I preferred not to use the most common and traditional translation of the word "הֶבֶל" "vanity," and chose to substitute it with a more neutral one – also because it is less common, that is, "evanescence." Consequently, as Ilaria Bertone writes: "the book of Qohelet can be read not as an ascetic book or, even worse, as a sceptical one, in which the value of everything under the sun is reduced to mere vanity. Rather, it is a text that thematizes the essentially ephemeral essence of man's work, without this implying a value judgment on the latter or a reduction of the whole of reality to an inconsistent breath."[10] Everything is evanescence, but if this evanescence is only and reductively comprised in the sphere of factual Being, then it has no sense at all, it is undifferentiated and uselessly bound to disappear in death without leaving any trace; if, however, it is comprised in the dimension of the difference of the Ought-to-be, which in Qohelet's religious language is the faith in the sense and goodness of the whole created by God, then it is the finite and limited – yet real and adequate – form of the realisation of the Ought-to-be and, as such, it has a meaning, which does not last in time, but it is sought and protected by God (cf. 3,15b) in the meaning and in the "beautiful" form of the whole.

Secondly, Qohelet's insistence on the exaltation of joy has to be understood in its correct meaning. In the third chapter, which has been dealt with above, in which Qohelet proposes the perspective of the sense of the whole created by God and of the wisdom of the heart – through which men are inspired by the idea of the sense of fullness that God put in them, and learn the fear of God and the commitment to do good – joy is also overtly mentioned as an essential part of this perspective: "I knew that there is nothing better for them but to rejoice and to do good during his lifetime. And also, every man who eats and drinks and enjoys what is good in all his toil, it is a gift of God" (3,12–13).

Qohelet's enhancement of joy and happiness is definitely not a superficial invitation to pleasure and the enjoyment of the present as an escape from the despair caused by the senselessness of the whole. Nor is it an invitation to hedonism as the

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[9] In this sense cf. G. BERTRAM, *Hebräischer und griechischer Qohelet. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der hellenistischen Bibel*, in "Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft," 64 (1952), p. 26. This is also the main thesis of Bertone's essay quoted above. Regarding my considerations here on the Book of Qohelet, I am particularly indebted to this essay and to the reflections the Author agreed to make with me.

[10] I. BERTONE, *op. cit.*, pp. 330f.

only relative, but present and concrete value. Qohelet thinks that joy is no better than sadness in itself, nor is laughter better than tears. He actually warns his readers against such an unjustified idea in several passages. Already in the second chapter he writes "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will mix [wine] with joy and experience pleasure;' and behold, this too was evanescence. Of laughter, I said, '[It is] mingled;' and concerning joy, 'What does this accomplish?'" (2,1–2). Then he admonishes in the seventh chapter: "Vexation is better than laughter, for with a stern countenance the heart will rejoice. The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning, whereas the heart of the fools is in a house of joy" (7,3–4).

As Alviero Niccacci rightfully observes in his essay on *Qohelet o la gioia come fatica e dono di Dio a chi lo teme*,[11] in which, after establishing a general interpretative framework of the Book of Qohelet, he analyses and comments on every single passage where the invitation to joy and happiness is mentioned, this topic can only be correctly understood if it is inextricably related to the fear of God. Men are invited to be happy and enjoy the pleasures of life in front of God, being aware that they are His gifts, their part of good, that God gives in return for their labour and their good deeds. Joy and happiness, therefore, are neither a futile evasion nor a reductive hedonism; they are rather a true moral duty of men, in a direct correlation with the fear of God, that is with the *Sehnsucht* of a fullness of sense, which is put by God in their heart. Men cannot see the full realisation of this fullness: actually, they always see events that contradict it "under the sun." But men must, and therefore can, also believe that through their labour and their good deeds the overall sense, the beauty of everything, wanted by God, actually comes true, though not completely. This morally appropriate attitude diverts men from any disgust and despair of reality and invites them to joy and happiness. It is the ethical duty of fighting the bitterness of irony, which belittles every finite and faulty reality because it does not correspond to the infinite and perfect ideal, and to take the opposite attitude of *humour*, which is able to smile at every expression of good and beauty, albeit limited and finite, because it is able to see in them the authentic realisation – poor, limited, faulty, nevertheless actual and concrete – of the ideal.

What is being discussed here is the joy of a feast, which, overcoming and abandoning its original sacred meanings, in Jewish monotheism assumes the essential ethical importance of a testimony and a recognition – despite all the evil and the pain – that there are good and beauty in the partial and "evanescent" but actual realisations that men can reach in the concrete historical reality. Hermann Cohen, in a beautiful passage of his *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*[12], writes: "Peace in the joy of the feast is a characteristic of the Jewish mentality. Considering the suffering that pervades the whole historical life of the Jew, it is

[11] A. NICCACCI, *Qohelet o la gioia come fatica e dono di Dio a chi lo teme*, in "Liber Annuus," 52 (2002), pp. 29–102; see above all the final *Valutazione* (pp. 94–102).

[12] H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, hg. von Benzion Kellermann, Fock, Leipzig 1919; hg. von Bruno Strauss, J. Kaufmann, Frankfurt a.M. 1929; repr. J. Melzer, Köln 1959, p. 170; Eng. trans. S. Kaplan, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., New York 1972, pp. 458f.

surely a wonder that he could continually maintain such equanimity, such a genuine humor, without which he would never have been able to lift himself again and again from the deepest humiliations to proud heights. The Jewish holidays have brought about this wonder for him. On the Sabbath and on the feasts, joy governed the Ghetto no matter how much suffering had embittered the days of the week. Joy on a holiday was a religious duty, and hence it became an inviolable and vital power in the Jewish consciousness."

As I have already said above, with these few free consideration I certainly do not claim to have given an exhaustive, precise and competent interpretation of the Book of Qohelet. I have simply tried to understand and offer some inspiration and suggestions from this text to consider the philosophical topic of the ethical difference. The Book of Qohelet is obviously an ancient text, and its perspective and language are of a religious nature. In order to use the suggestions one can draw from it in the philosophical sphere, one must move them into the perspective and language of philosophy, trying to keep their original meaning.

It seems to me that, in philosophical terms, it is possible to gain from this text a recognition and a confirmation of what I tried to expose at the beginning. That is, the ethical difference in its two fundamental aspects.

First of all, the transcendence of the Ought-to-be with respect to Being. This transcendence is irreducible and any attempt at eliminating it leads inevitably to a thought of identity, in which there cannot be space for authentic ethics. This, I believe, is at least one of the senses in which Plato writes that good is "beyond Being in dignity and power." And this is the sense in which Kant writes that practical philosophy provides the reasons "of what *ought to happen*, even if it never does." Without the transcendence of the Ought-to-be, what is real would be a criterion of what ought to be; whereas, on the contrary, an ethical perspective only exists where it is acknowledged that what ought to be is the criterion of what is. As Kant clearly and radically clarifies in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*[13], what differentiates the pure practical reason – the autonomously moral will – from the natural and empirical desire is that in the latter the judgement of reason is preceded and determined by the physical possibility of a realisation of the object of desire, while in the first the judgement of reason is totally independent from the physical possibility of the object and is determined only by the moral possibility, that is by the legitimacy of the deed.

Kant goes even further, stating that the moral necessity of the law doesn't ensure the reason of necessity or of actuality, but at least it ensures the physical possibility of the deed appropriate to that law. In the famous example that ends the *Anmerkung* after the *Aufgabe II*, which depends on the *Lehrsatz III* in the same work, he considers what a person would do if, under death threat, he was forced by the prince to bear false testimony against an innocent, and he writes: "he would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something

[13] I. KANT, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 5., pp. 57ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 50ff.

[*daß er etwas kann*] because he is aware that he ought to do it [*daß er es soll*]."[14] This introduces the second essential meaning of the ethical difference: the Ought-to-be, which is irreducibly transcendent with respect to Being, is still actually realisable in the Being; indeed it has no other place but its actual realisations in Being and has no meaning but as principle and criterion of judgement of the actual historical deed. This protects the ethical ideal from any utopian or ascetic abstraction, and moreover – more importantly – from this derives that an understanding of Being that not only just describes natural processes (which is legitimate as a programme and method of the specific and peculiar natural sciences), but also aspires to raise this description to a total and systematic view of reality, is partial and therefore false – if made absolute. As I stated when I first began these considerations, the ethical difference is not only a difference from Being, but a difference in Being. One cannot leave this difference out of consideration, if one seeks to understand not simple Being (*τὸ ὄν*) or entities (*τὰ ὄντα*), but true Being (*τὸ ὄντως ὄν*).

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 30; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 27f. The example is probably inspired by Juvenal (*Satires*, VIII, 79–84), which in fact is explicitly quoted in a similar moral exemplification in the *Methodenlehre der reinen praktischen Vernunft* (cf. I. KANT, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, cit., pp. 158f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 131).

Cadenza 2
Humour as a Sign of History

Humour is a widely analysed topic in the theory of postmodernism, as a category that is not only aesthetic, but also historical and political, and even as a peculiar characteristic of the thought of difference, typical of postmodern culture, after the final parting from the metaphysical thought of identity and representation. Therefore the role played by humour in postmodernity is not at all minor, but fundamental and extremely significant.

In witness thereof, one can start from a passage of the famous *Theatrum Philosophicum,*[1] in which Michel Foucault enthusiastically welcomes Giles Deleuze's work *Difference and Repetition*[2] as the opening of a new era of thought.[3] In that essay, Foucault recognises Deleuze's new thought of difference as humour, in contrast with serious philosophy and irony: "To reverse Platonism with Deleuze is to displace oneself insidiously within it, to descend a notch, to descend to its smallest gestures – discreet, but *moral* – which serve to exclude the simulacrum; it is also to deviate slightly from it, to open the door from either side to the small talk it excluded; it is to initiate another disconnected and divergent series; it is to construct, by way of this small lateral leap, a dethroned para-Platonism. To convert Platonism (a serious task) is to increase its compassion for reality, for the world, and for time. To subvert Platonism is to begin at the top (the vertical distance of irony)

[1] M. FOUCAULT, *Theatrum philosophicum*, in IDEM, *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, Édition établie sous la direction de Daniel Defert et François Ewald avec la collaboration de Jacques Lagrange, Gallimard, Paris 1994, vol. II; Eng. trans. D. F. Bouchard and S. Simon, in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Ed. James D. Faubion. New York: New Press, 1998, pp. 343–368.

[2] G. DELEUZE, *Différence et répétition*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1968; Eng. trans. P. Patton, The Athlone Press, London 1994.

[3] "This thought does not lie in the future, promised by the most distant of new beginnings. It is present in Deleuze's texts-springing forth, dancing before us, in our midst:" M. FOUCAULT, *op. cit*, vol. 2, p. 367.

A. Poma, *Cadenzas*, Studies in German Idealism 18,
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and to grasp its origin. To pervert Platonism is to search out the smallest details, to descend (with the natural gravitation of humor) as far as its crop of hair or the dirt under its fingernails – those things that were never hallowed by an idea; it is to discover the decentering it put into effect in order to recenter itself around the Model, the Identical, and the Same; it is the decentering of oneself with respect to Platonism so as to give rise to the play (as with every perversion) of surfaces at its border. Irony rises and subverts; humor falls and perverts."[4]

In this passage, Foucault summarises Deleuze's position with efficiency and precision. Deleuze explains his view clearly, contrasting a thought of the surface – which, as we have seen, is indicated as "perversion" – with Plato's thought of height and the thought of depth developed by Nietzsche and the Pre-Socratics he was inspired by. In *The Logic of Sense*, and precisely in the chapter *On the Three Images of Philosophers*, he writes: "The double sense of the surface, the continuity of the reverse and right sides, replace height and depth (...). Sense appears and is played out at the surface (at least if one knows how to mix it properly) in such a way that it forms letters of dust. It is like a fogged-up windowpane on which one can write with one's finger (...). The philosopher is no longer the being of the caves, nor Plato's soul or bird, but rather the animal which is on a level with the surface – a tick or louse. The philosophical symbol is no longer the Platonic wing, or Empedocles's lead sandal, but the reversible cloak of Antisthenes and Diogenes (...). What are we to call the new philosophical operation, insofar as it opposes at once Platonic conversion and pre-Socratic subversion? Perhaps we can call it 'perversion,' which at least befits the system of provocations of this new type of philosopher – if it is true that perversion implies an extraordinary art of surfaces."[5] It is no coincidence that the immediately following chapter of this work by Deleuze is entitled *On Humour*: humour is another name of perversion, of the thought of the surface. This is how Deleuze describes "the adventure of humour:" "What does the wise man find at the surface? Pure events considered from the perspective of their eternal truth, that is, from the point of view of the substance which sub-tends them, independent of their spatio-temporal actualization in a state of affairs. Or, what amounts to the same thing, one finds pure singularities, an emission of singularities considered from the perspective of their aleatory element, independent of the individuals and persons which embody them or actualize them."[6] In the conclusion he declares humour a "new value:" "The tragic and the ironic give way to a new value, that of humor. For if irony is the co-extensiveness of being with the individual, or of the I with representation, humor is the co-extensiveness of sense with nonsense. Humor is the art of the surfaces and of the doubles, of nomad singularities and of the always displaced aleatory point; it is the art of the static genesis, the savoir-faire of the pure event, and

[4] *Ibid*., p.78., Eng. trans. cit., p. 346.

[5] G. DELEUZE, *Logique du sens*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1969, p.158; Eng. trans. M. Lester and Ch. Stivale, ed. by C. V. Boundas, The Athlon Press, London 1990, p. 133.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 161; Eng. trans. cit., p. 136.

the 'fourth person singular' – with every signification, denotation, and manifestation suspended, all height and depth abolished."[7]

It should be no wonder that the new thought of difference is intended as a "perversion." The intransigent and definite unmasking and refusal of the Idea as a totalitarian identity and of thought as an authoritatively legitimated representation of the identical leads consequently to the vanity and deception of seeing the path towards an emancipation of thought in dialectics – which, whether it ends with a synthesis or not, because of its character of contraposition, still remains entirely in the thetic game of the identical – but also in critique; and the latter, both because of the implicit or explicit premise of a "criterion" of judgement and because of the – inevitably presumed – goal of stating the truth, still belongs to the metaphysical theatre, that of the representation of the identical.

A greatly similar consideration of humour can be found in Jean-François Lyotard's works, on which I will dwell a little longer not only because he is one of the most important theorists of postmodernism and can undoubtedly be considered the most "Kantian" of those, but above all because in the evolution of his thought there are elements that I believe are particularly interesting in relation to the topic I am tackling here. In Lyotard, or at least in the first phase of his thought, in which he is really close to Deleuze's perspective, humour is as significant and relevant as mentioned above. Here humour appears in the form of "parody," but what is parody, if not an intervention on a model, which does not oppose an alternative and antagonist model and does not even criticise it (because that would imply a "criterion"), but imposes a metamorphosis on it, indeed a "perversion," that delegitimises it without legitimising itself or being legitimised, but only enjoying, happily but without joy, its own bottomless and endless evenementiality?

In fact, this is already analysed in the theory of "double reversal," developed in *Derivations starting from Marx and Freud*.[8] As is widely known, Lyotard presents this programme for the "anti-art," inspired by Paul Klee's way of working: it is not a free expression of the primary ghost, which is the object of desire, but an intrusion and a trace of the primary on the secondary, which ruins the excessively safe reality of the latter, letting out the flows of libidinal energies free from the constraint of sense and representation, opening holes in the fabric of reality, whence various "figures" emerge that overturn the power of reality. Of course this is an aesthetical programme, but at the same time it is also political; Lyotard writes: "The system, as it exists, absorbs every consistent discourse, the important thing is not to produce a consistent discourse but rather to produce 'figures' within reality. The problem is to endure the anguish of maintaining reality in a state of suspicion through direct

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 166; Eng. trans. cit., p. 141.

[8] Cf. J.-F. LYOTARD, *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud*, Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris 1973, pp.236f. The essay is partly translated as "Notes on the Critical Function of the Work of Art," in *Driftworks*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1984, pp. 69–84.

practices."[9] Thus supporting Deleuze's and Guattari's position in the *Anti-Oedipe,*[10] he believes that the thought of difference needs to escape the illusion of critique, which always goes back to the dialectic game of representation, emancipating itself from parody: "Metaphysics is the force of discourse potential in all discourse. What counts is that it changes the scene, the dramaturgy, the site, the modality of inscription, the filter, and thus the libidinal position. Thinkers think metaphysical theatricality, and yet the position of desire is displaced, desire works, new machines start up, old ones stop working or idle for a moment or race and heat up. This transport of force does not belong to thought or to metaphysics. Deleuze and Guattari's book represents this transport in discourse. If you understand only its re-presentation, you have lost it; you would be right, you would have *reason*, in the interior of this figure, according to the criteria of this dipositif. But you will be forgotten, as everything is forgotten that is not forgetting, everything that is placed within the theatre, the museum, the school. In the libidinal dispositif that is rising, to be right, to have reason – that is, to place oneself in the museum – is not what is important; what is important is to be able to laugh and dance."[11] Arguing with Adorno's critical thought, he once again sets parody against critique. Adorno imagines modern art as the end of appearance, as a criticism of it and therefore as knowledge, but Lyotard refuses this critical dialectics and recognises the new path in contemporary music by Berio, Cage or others: "We have to leave behind this alternative: neither appearance, *musica ficta*, nor laborious knowledge, *musica fingens*; the metamorphic game of sonorous intensities, the parodic work of nothing, *musica figura*."[12]

Lyotard explicitly indicates the thought of difference as "humour" in *Rudiments païens.*[13] He clearly distinguishes it from "irony:" "While irony is a nihilism of meanings, humor is held in the affirmation of tensions."[14] This attitude is characterised by a total pulsional positivity, contrarily to the oppositional negativity of critique,[15] and by a refusal of any legitimation of discourse, of any truth, as perspectivism and indifference of the differences. Lyotard writes: "But first of all, humor doesn't mock (*raille*): irony does. The latter says: your laws of discourse, of State, your habits and your case series are derisory, there is undoubtedly a good distance, but it is kept secret, we do not know it, we can only prepare ourselves according to its need for angelism and adoration, and make war to those who ignore it (...).

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 242 Eng. trans. cit., p. 79.

[10] G. DELEUZE – F. GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'Anti-Œdipe*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1972; Eng. trans. B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 1987.

[11] J.-F- LYOTARD, *Capitalisme énergumène*, in IDEM, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris 1973, p. 51. The English translation appears in *Accelerate*, ed. by R. Mackay and A. Avanessian, Urbanomic, Falmouth, pp. 177–227. This quote comes from pp. 226f.

[12] J.-F. LYOTARD, *Adorno as the Devil*, in IDEM, *Telos,* No. 19, Spring 1974, p. 132.

[13] J.-F. LYOTARD, *Rudiments païens, genre dissertatif*, Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris 1977[1].

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 46f.

[15] "Humour procedes from an Eros that is all *Poros,* nothing but a way to make it so *(moyen de moyonner),* as from a logic without aporia and a politics without utopia:" *ibid.*, p. 58.

Humour says: there is no good viewpoint (*bonne vue*), neither things in the world nor discourses make up a framework, or make one up for themselves; it is by the arbitrary decision of the beholder, a prince or a wise man. We exhibit this arbitrariness, not to turn it into ridicule, but to seize it infiltrated with a logic, a space, a time that are not those of the representative framework, the logic of singularities, nearby space (the infinites), and the time of moments. Humour does not advocate a more universal truth than that of the masters, it does not even fight in the name of the majority, accusing the masters of being a minority; it rather wants us to admit this: that *there are nothing but minorities*."[16]

Therefore, humour enters Lyotard's considerations not merely as a secondary topic, but as a peculiar characteristic of the new thought, which he indicates as "paganism," and takes on the explicit form of "parody;" Lyotard writes: "A libidinal history is above all a pagan history. The paganism one thinks of in this case involves not only the multiplicity of gods, that is, the lofty indifference towards the issue of exclusivity in the performative act of speech – 'All of the [ancient] gods died of mad laughter at hearing one of them call himself the only god' – but it also results in this peculiar trait that the Romans gods demand be rendered to them, besides the tribute of regular cults, the apparently inconsistent one of scenic games, the derisive honour of parodies. Therefore not only the worship of a multiplicity of functions each of which would be solely and constantly assigned to such god and honoured in the established rituals; but the theatrical realization of the fortuitous 'situations,' of the encounters that each deity can have 'with either another god, or a mortal creature,' and that openly deny the exclusive and uplifting function that the state cults tend to assign to it (...).

We must associate the paganism of a history and a politics as we research them to this theme of intensities obtained with parodies and apparently in pure loss, in which one recognizes the unexpected and unstoppable movements (according to Freud) of the drives over the libidinal 'body' of Rome."[17]

By "parody," Lyotard basically means the same thing he meant with "double reversal:" "Paganism as we think of it cannot therefore be that of ancient instituted religions, even if Dionysian: it consists of the infiltration into the surface of the social 'body' of areas left free for the imaginations and the concrete initiatives defined unruly, unnecessary, dangerous, singular – that is, the drives, and this within the political and religious institutions themselves."[18]

Once the credibility of the great legitimising narrations has been destroyed, it is the beginning of a time and a culture of thought and action that are delegitimised, perverted, the mere flux of a libidinal, nomadic and anarchic power: pure differences that do not tolerate any reduction to form, to truth, to a goal and to unity in general. The fact that this has nothing to do with the criticism towards alleged metaphysical, linguistic, scientific or political absolutes[19] does not diminish its power

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 50f.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 166f.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

[19] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 29.

and desecrating efficacy in delegitimising those absolutes: rather, this is about the dissimulating efficacy of parody. Taking the cue from Freud, who in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* – despite recognising the insufficient scientific validity of his new hypothesis – proceeds to formulate his theory, Lyotard lays claims not on the legitimacy, but on the freedom (in the sense of a Sadian "libertinage"[20]) to build "theories-fictions," which not only propose themselves arbitrarily, but in doing this also parodistically bring an end to the truth claim of scientific theories: "A final word: if one goes into exile from the society of the wise, should one renounce to intervene in it, to criticize, to discuss? Not at all: theoretical apathy is not a state of depression, it is accompanied by the greatest intransigence towards the discourses that arise under the law of truth and falsehood. There is no tolerance for what, in this field, fails to meet the requirements that define it. Freud sees this very well. Do not hope, therefore, that the artists of the theory-fiction will leave the field open to the theory-truth: on the contrary they will *also* be present in this old battle, and it will be to argue. So dissimulation is complete, it not being possible to discern (in terms of true or false) parody from its purported 'model.' Only those who have recovered from a theoretical pathos, the apathetic, will not lose their head and heart in it."[21]

Similarly, in politics Lyotard rejects critique as it is intended by the Marxist tradition, which always presupposes the destruction of the false to establish the truth[22] like Bloch's utopia, and only spares that little humour it contains, which consists in the "inability to get a foothold in the elsewhere and put it to good use, theoretical and practical" and counterbalances the irony of the "elsewhere assured."[23] Instead, he extols the virtues of the "pagan" demonstrations of the sans-culottes, which "always in the form of parodies and stage plays, which give rise to the disturbing festivities and drop the separation, which is essential from the totalizing point of view, between reality and fiction."[24] Those parodies are the expression of the "power" that delegitimises "power," even the critical and revolutionary one.[25] That parody has a political efficacy in that it frees the flux of the impulses on the surface of the social body, thus jamming the program of totalitarian organisation carried out by the establishment; Lyotard writes: "Dancing and laughing, the sans-culottes escapes the powers. The latter can only wait until he ceases to take him back in hand, to make him fit in the order of political and religious theatricality. The parody is the impotence of power because it is the power that authorizes itself."[26]

In 1979 Jean-Francois Lyotard published *Au juste. Conversations*[27]: a dialogue with Jean-Loup Thébaud that plays a major role in the development of Lyotard's

[20] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[22] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 118f.

[23] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 69.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[25] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 170.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 190f.

[27] J.-F. LYOTARD, J.-L. THÉBAUD, *Au juste. Conversations*, Christian Bourgois Éditeur, Paris 1979. Eng. trans. W. Godzick, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985.

thinking. I believe this text is a rare testimony of truthfulness and intellectual honesty, because in it a philosopher, Lyotard, not only recognises the limits of his previous position and takes a new path, but he also offers the reader the document, the record of the process through which his position was discredited and subject to revision. As is well known, the dialogue is about the historical-political judgement of justice. In the first conversations Lyotard puts forward again the perspective of "paganism" in its two constitutive elements: the plurality of language games, which can never be related to a criterion of doctrinal truth, and the consideration of those language games as energetic fluxes of "power," independent from any value criterion. His interlocutor Jean-Loup Thébaud, however, insistently provokes him in relation to the fundamental consideration of what is right and what is wrong in relation to the various "games," the different historical and political positions, choices and actions, until Lyotard, at the beginning of the "*Cinquième journée*," is forced to reconsider his position. Although I cannot dwell too long on this, it is significant in many ways that Lyotard surrenders on the topic of the political acceptability of terrorism.[28]

The new direction of Lyotard's ethical-political thinking includes recognising "with considerable regret"[29] that his previous "libidinal" perspective is unsustainable: "it is true that a philosophy of the will cannot be passed, as such, as political philosophy. It does not work (...). It is not true that one can do an aesthetic politics. It is not true the search for intensities or things of that type can ground politics, because there is the problem of injustice."[30] So for Lyotard this is on the one hand about keeping the "pagan" necessity of recognising "minorities," the plurality of language games against the Terror of a doctrine that claims to be true and therefore imposes its games eliminating the others; on the other hand it is about recognising the consideration of the judgement of what is right and wrong against ethical-political scepticism and indifference. Therefore Lyotard, still refusing any totalitarian perspective that claims to determine the prescriptive linguistic game on the basis of a "metaphysical" doctrine made of denotative propositions that are assumed as "true," recovers the path – which he had already indicated as Kantian and Judaic (understood as in Lévinas) – of an "Idea" that does not determine, but regulates. In this idea one can recognise the (transcendent though indeterminate) origin of the ethical and political "obligation:" this Idea is not a metaphysical principle that can determine the content of ethical conduct, but an indeterminate rule that is nonetheless enough to judge "immediately" (*coup par coup*) what is right and what is wrong. Lyotard writes: "I hesitate between two positions, while still hoping that my hesitation is vain and that these are not two positions. To put it quickly, between a Pagan position, in the sense of the Sophists, and the position that is, let us say, Kantian. I see quite well where their proximity lives: it is in the fact that there is no reason of history. I mean that no one can place himself or herself in the position of an utterer on the course of things. And therefore there is no court in which one can

[28] Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 129ff.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 77ff.

[29] Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 169; Eng. trans. cit., p. 89.

[30] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 170f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 90f.

adjudicate the reason of history (...). There is no knowledge in matters of ethics. And therefore there will be no knowledge in matters of politics (...). And I would situate the divergence, if you will, by saying that it is the difference between a 'philosophy' (but it is not a philosophy) of opinion and of the verisimilar that one finds among Sophists, the Cynics, probably among the Skeptics, as well as in Aristotle, on one side; and on the other, a philosophy of Idea."[31]

According to this interpretation by Lyotard, Kant's regulative idea is an idea without a concept: this is the reason why it is different from a metaphysical principle, which is determining and totalitarian; on the other hand, it is "a maximization of concepts outside of any knowledge of reality:"[32] this is why it can be the regulative "horizon" for the judgement of what is right, which prevents it from vanishing into indifference: "Then the direction of opinion will be reversed: it is not taken any more as a sediment of facts of judgement and behavior; it is weighed from a capability that exceeds it and that can be in a wholly paradoxical position with respect to the data of custom."[33]

However, the conciliation of the two necessities mentioned above raises the question of the finalistic character of the Kantian Idea. In fact in Kant, though indeterminate, it is oriented towards a goal, a totality, the totality of the reasonable being in a historical-political perspective, mankind from a cosmopolitan point of view or perpetual peace. For Lyotard, the question is the following: "can we do politics without finality?"[34], or, in a different but analogous formulation: "Well how does one maximize opinion? How does one introduce opinion into the Kantian register?"[35] After the end of the great ideological tales, postmodern culture is characterised by the awareness of the immeasurable and irreducible multiplicity of language games; Lyotard writes: "The picture that one can draw from this observation is precisely that of an absence of unity, and absence of totality. All of this does not make up a body. On the contrary. And the idea that I think we need today in order to make decisions in political matters cannot be the idea of the totality, or of the unity, of a body. It can only be the idea of a multiplicity or of a diversity. Then the question arises: how can a regulatory use of this idea of the political take place? How can it be pragmatically efficacious (to the point where, for example, it would make one decision just and another unjust)? Is a politics regulated by such an idea of multiplicity possible? Is it possible to decide in a just way in, and according to, this multiplicity? And here I must say that I don't know."[36]

Despite him recognising his own ignorance, the dialogue ends with an indication of the Jewish humour as the reference to find the solution to the problem presented before, that is the "critique of political judgment;"[37] humour here is intended in a

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 141ff; Eng. trans. cit., p. 73ff.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 144; Eng. trans. cit., p. 75.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 157; Eng. trans. cit., p. 82.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 147. Eng. trans. cit., p. 76.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 151. Eng. trans. cit., p. 79.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 178f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 93f.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 155; cf. pp. 168,173.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 91.

form that Lyotard thinks he has come across in Martin Buber's Hasidism, presented in his novel *Gog and Magog*[38]: "And so, when the question of what justice consists in is raised, the answer is: 'It remains to be seen in each case,' and always in humour, but also in worry, because one is never certain that one has been just, or that one can ever be just."[39] Humour, as the Hasidic masters teach, is the ability to paradoxically hold together the rule and its inapplicability; Lyotard writes: "If you will, one could look at the problem in another way, through humor. The relation to plurality is tied up with humor, in the case of Hassidism. For example, one tells a little story; the question is going to be whether there is, hidden in this little story, a prescription of any importance. The humor then is going to come in will show that the distance from the story one started out with to a given prescription is always immense. That is, the prescription is always transcendental (...). It can never be derived. And therefore the question of prescription will always remain an open question."[40]

In his later works, however, Lyotard does not follow this cue, but a totally different one: the "sublime." Several factors led him to this choice: the suspicion towards the totalitary meaning of the practical Idea of freedom in Kant, the reflecting character of the ethical-political judgement, the refusal to place it under the sign of "pleasure" and "displeasure," the exceeding character and the unpresentability of the Idea. The fact is that Lyotard leaves aside the theme of humour, which almost disappears from his later considerations, and devotes a great deal of energy to an analysis of the sublime in Kant, in the hope to find in it the model for an Idea that regulates ethical and political judgement.

In a deep and clever analysis of the Kantian theory of the sublime, carried out in the *Leçons sur l'Analitique du sublime*,[41] Lyotard retrieves all the main characteristics of the sublime according to Kant, in particular its inner relationship between aesthetics and ethics, its character of exceeding and unpresentable absolute, its being different from the beautiful. Rather, he underlines those characters – even unilaterally, as he himself admits in relation to the discontinuity between sublime and beautiful,[42] because he wants "to isolate the analysis of a differend of feeling in Kant's text, which is also the analysis of a feeling of differend, and to connect this feeling with the transport that leads all thought (critical thought included) to its limits."[43]

In conclusion, however, this results in the observation that it is impossible to consider the sublime as "the aesthetic feeling inspired by moral judgment."[44] When

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[38] M. BUBER, *Gog und Magog. Eine Chronik* (1943), in IDEM, *Werke*, Bd. 3., *Schriften zum Chassidismus*, Kösel/Lambert Schneider, München – Heidelberg 1963, pp. 999–1261.

[39] J.-F. LYOTARD, J.-L. THÉBAUD, *Au juste. Conversations*, cit., p. 187. Eng. trans. cit., p. 99.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 185; Eng. trans. cit., p. 98.

[41] J.-F. LYOTARD, *Leçons sur l'Analytique du sublime (Kant, critique de la faculté de juger, §§ 23–29)*, Éditions Galilée, Paris 1991. Eng. trans. E. Rottenberg, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1994.

[42] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 95, Eng. trans. cit., p. 73.

[43] *Ibid.,* p. 10, Eng. trans. cit., p. IX.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 281, Eng. trans. cit., p. 234.

commenting on the final *Appendix* of Kant's *Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft*, Lyotard finds in it the same problem he has: how the feeling of taste, though not identical to the moral motive – that is the sense of respect for the law – can however be a "sign" of moral interest, above all of a historical-political one, in the discernment about right and wrong, as an orientation of the judgment towards an unconditioned (though unpresentable) horizon, which however, contrarily to Kant's, is not teleological, but goes back to the idea of diversity. Lyotard writes: "What is of interest to our discussion here is that this exercise of moral discernment in which reflection is formed in the practical realm – the reflection whose responsibility it is to 'decide' what is good – must 'gradually produce a certain interest even in its [reason's] own law (…).' This interest is signaled by a feeling that should be the sensation we are trying to isolate: the state in which thought, discovering the purity of a maxim, finds itself and recognizes the 'sign' of the moral law's 'presence' in the maxim. This 'sign' signifies not only that the will obeys an interested motivation, including the one that may push it to accord itself with moral law, but that pure practical reason, the free (absolutely first) causality, is implicated in the determination of the will. This sensation is a kind of liking."[45]

However, Lyotard concludes[46] that this feeling cannot be the sublime, for two reasons: being so significant as a feeling of difference, on the one hand, unlike the beautiful, it does not consist in the pleasure found in a harmony of faculties, but on the contrary it is the feeling of disproportion, of a lack of form, of exceedance[47]; on the other hand, it cannot satisfy the demand for universality – meant also as subjective universality, that is as universal communication – but on the contrary it is the violent sense of difference that resists any communication.[48] Given the irreconcilability of the wanted characteristics, Kant's sublime cannot be "the aesthetic feeling

[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 281f., Eng. trans. cit., p. 235.

[46] Here Lyotard agrees with Kant himself, who, as is well known, in the conclusion of his *Kritik der ästhetischen Urtheilskraft,* establishes beauty, not the sublime, as "the symbol of morality:" cf. I. KANT, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 5., § 59, p. 352; Eng. trans. J. Creed Meredith, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1952, p. 221.

[47] "Thus the term to compare, in the order of the aesthetic, with the feeling provided by the ethical maxim is not sublime feeling but the feeling of the beautiful. Sublime feeling is in no way a happy disposition of thought. The powers of thought in sublime feeling in no way relate to one another according to a good proportion; they 'disproportion' themselves violently. The object that occasions the sublime is assuredly a 'sign,' the sign of a supersensible sphere, bur it disarms the presentation and goes so far as to discredit the phenomenality of the phenomenon.": J.-F. LYOTARD, *Leçons sur l'Analytique du sublime (Kant, Critique de la faculté de juger, §§ 23–29)*, cit., pp. 284f., Eng. trans. cit., p. 237.

[48] "Morality thus intrinsically demands to be universally communicated, and it is analogous in this respect to the feeling of the beautiful. But it is analogous only, for this demand is legitimated by an Idea immediately or unconditionally present, always present, and present *a priori* to the thought that desires: the concept of freedom. Whereas the demand to be immediately communicated in taste must be deduced from a principle of *sensus communis*, that, in turn, is legitimated by a 'supersensible' Idea that is hidden and according to which the forms in nature are in affinity with the states of thought. As for the sublime, it escapes both demands for universal communication.": *ibid.*, p. 286, Eng. trans. cit., p. 239.

inspired by moral judgment;" in fact, Lyotard concludes that: "The Idea of the absolute is not present to thought here in the necessary form of respect. The Idea of the finality without concept of a form of pure pleasure cannot be suggested by the violent contra-finality of the object. The sublime feeling is neither moral universality nor aesthetic universalization, but is, rather, the destruction of one by the other in the violence of their differend. This differend cannot demand, even subjectively, to be communicated to all thought."[49]

This negative conclusion is not necessarily an obstacle for such considerations as Lyotard's views and postmodern thought in general, which are at ease among contradictions and try to turn them into paradoxes, which are granted their own sense because they force and violate the logic of the classical argument. The point is to challenge paradoxical thinking, especially when it must satisfy univocal and ethically relevant demands such as to present a "sign" to find one's way when choosing right or wrong in historical-political judgement.

In any case, a few years before the publication of his analysis of Kant's theory of the sublime, Lyotard published an essay, a comment on Kant's works about history, in which he recognises in "enthusiasm" precisely that "sign of history" towards the sublime that he was looking for.[50] In this essay, Lyotard recovers the importance of critique when doing philosophy, not following the "*Schulbegriff*," the "*school concept*," but the "*Weltbegriff*," the "*world concept*:" that is, following the "philosophical ideal" to "judge the claims to validity of all 'knowledges' (which I call phrases), and this in their respective relations with the essential ends of human reason;"[51] in order to be "moral politicians," who analyse historical events on the basis of an ideal "purpose," not pragmatic "political moralists," who only provide contradictory examples about historical data.[52] He also underlines – for himself and for posterity – the necessity of being "philosophers" and "moral politicians;"[53] in Kant's work he looks, if not for a "method," at least for a "manner" to exercise this essential political criticism. Lyotard refers to a famous passage of *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, in which Kant recognises "a *position taking* [a participation] based on desire (*eine Teilnehmung dem Wunsche nach*) which borders closely on enthusiasm" of the uninvolved spectators of the French Revolution as a "sign of history" (*Geschichtszeichen*), which not only makes it possible to predict a constant progress towards the better, but is already a stage of it.[54]

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[49] *Ibidem.*

[50] J.-F. LYOTARD, *L'enthousiasme. La critique kantienne de l'histoire*, Éditions Galilée, Paris 1986; Eng. trans. G. Van Den Abbeele, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2009.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 20; Eng. trans. cit., p. 3.

[52] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 53f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 26f. Cf. also pp. 52f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 25f.

[53] Cf. *ibid*., p. 108; Eng. trans. cit., p. 63.

[54] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 54–58; Eng trans. cit., p. 28. The work by Kant Lyotard is referring to is I. KANT, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 7., pp. 84–87.

Regarding enthusiasm as a sign of history, therefore, Lyotard underlines three important features. First, it is a "modality of the sublime feeling,"[55] or rather "an extreme mode of the sublime: the attempt at presentation not only fails, arousing the sad tension, but it reverses itself, so to speak, or inverts itself in order to supply a supremely paradoxical presentation, which Kant calls 'a merely negative presentation,' 'a kind of abstraction,' and which he boldly characterises as a 'presentation of the infinite' (…). What we have here is the most inconsistent possible 'passage,' the impasse as 'passage'."[56] Secondly, as a sublime feeling enthusiasm is paradoxically a sign of the sense of history, because it relates to an ideal purpose precisely starting from a chaotic reality, which has no apparent form or purpose: "But in the enthusiasm this 'formlessness' arouses in the *Gemüt* of spectators, this failure of every possible purposiveness is itself rendered purposeful."[57] Thirdly, this feeling appeals to a "common sense," to a consensus, which is not reduced to an empirical and contingent agreement, but exists *a priori*, not because it relates to principles that are assumed as apodictic, but because it refers to a future community that can only be presented indirectly in the ideal sphere. This reference to the ideal has a particular connotation in the case of the sublime; Lyotard writes: "The case of the sublime feeling is even more different [from that of the beautiful] insofar as the status of the community is concerned. This community can no more be presented directly here than it could in the case of taste. But in contradiction to taste, the communicability required by the sublime feeling does not need a community of sensibility or of imagination, but one of practical reason, of ethics. The addressee must be made to understand here that the measurelessness [*démesure*] of size and might in nature is as nothing compared to our moral destination, freedom. And the addressee, if the argument is to be understood, must have cultivated this Idea of freedom to oneself. That's why the sensibility of the sublime, fully aesthetic though it remains, can serve as an index of humanity's progress in ethical culture, that is to say, 'toward the better'."[58]

So Lyotard concludes by emphasising the sublime, paradoxical character that infinitely refers to an unpresentable Idea of enthusiasm as a sign of history: "So it is not just any aesthetic phrase, but that of the extreme sublime, which is able to display (*beweisen*) that humanity is constantly progressing toward the better. The beautiful is not sufficient; it is merely a symbol of the good. But, because the sublime is the sentimental paradox, the paradox of experiencing publicly and *de jure* as a group that something which is 'formless' alludes to a beyond of experience, it constitutes an 'as-if' presentation of the Idea of morality, right where that idea nevertheless cannot be presented, within experience."[59]

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[55] J.-F. LYOTARD, *L'enthousiasme. La critique kantienne de l'histoire*, cit., p. 59; Eng. trans. cit., p. 29.

[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 61f.; Eng. trans. cit,. pp. 30f.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 65; Eng. trans. cit., p. 33.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 72; Eng. trans. cit., p. 37.

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 74f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 39.

This paradoxical feeling, the sublime, is not an aesthetic evasion from the history of utopia.[60] On the contrary, it is the "vigorous *Affekt*"[61] that the "moral politician" must arouse in a partner, to whom "the power of struggle must be rendered because the partner thinks, and in the thinking of history a disgust for history and the abandonment of thought break through. The addressee must be torn from the perverse fascination of indifferentism, of the 'It's all the same,' and even from the melancholia of the 'We don't matter.' What must be rendered to the addressee is the *sublime humour* the critical judge judges the addressee not only to be capable of but that must be cultivated."[62]

This is interesting: in this passage "humour," in the strange compound "sublime humour," appears again. This appearance is certainly significant, even if it must be admitted that the whole sense of the consideration goes rather towards highlighting and radicalising in the direction of the sublime.

Actualising Kant's teachings, Lyotard focuses on the novelty of the postmodern situation as opposed to Kant's. With the end of modernity and of the illusion of a finalistic unity, with the end of any kind of unity of subject and reason, today people are exposed to a radical and non-combinable "fission" of "the infinity of heterogeneous finalities."[63] This does not mean that the sublime feeling can no longer be the leading thread to direct historical-political judgement. On the contrary, Lyotard believes that "this *Begebenheit* of our time would thus lead into a new kind of sublime, one even more paradoxical than that of enthusiasm, in which not only the irremediable gap between an Idea and whatever presents itself in order to 'realize it' would be felt, but also the gap between various phrase families and their respective legitimate presentations."[64] By means of this second-grade paradox, that is to say the reference to an infinitely exceeding finality – which in turn consists in the non-finality of the infinite heterogeneous finalities – Lyotard writes that his historical-political programme consists in "discerning, respecting, and making respected the differends, in establishing the incommensurability of the transcendental exigencies proper to heterogeneous phrase families, and to find other languages for what cannot be expressed within existing languages."[65]

In my opinion, however, the solution Lyotard provided is not successful. As we have briefly seen, he takes the path of the Kantian sublime, recovering its characteristics and carrying them to extremes. In so doing, however, he moves the paradox – or, to use his own expression, the "parathesis" – from the arguments on the Idea to the Idea itself. This way the Idea is moved into ineffable infinity and is made ineffective as an ideal for historical-political judgement. After all, Lyotard himself comes to this conclusion, at the end of his deep analysis of the Kantian sublime, as he observes that, because of the impossibility of a universal communication, the

[60] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 101; Eng. trans cit., p. 57.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 102; Eng. trans. cit., p. 57.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 103; Eng. trans. cit., p. 58. The italics is mine.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 109; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 63f.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 108; Eng. trans. cit., p. 63.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 114; Eng. trans. cit., p. 67.

sublime cannot inspire moral judgment.[66] Once again, the considerations about the historical-political judgement on right and wrong have got no solution. The heterogeneous multiplicity of the differends is not subjected to a historical judgement or to a political choice, save the exclusion of Terror. But if Terror, according to the definition given by Lyotard, is "efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him,"[67] it must be recognised that the elimination of the possibility itself of a judgment on right and wrong, the equivalence of all the possible language games, a consequence of their incommensurable heterogeneity, and therefore the resort to violence and war as the only relationship possible between them is also Terror. After all, Lyotard himself is convinced of this, when he writes: "Absolute injustice would occur if the pragmatics of obligation, that is, the possibility of continuing to play the game of the just, were excluded. That is what is unjust. Not the opposite of the just, but that which prohibits that the question of the just and the unjust be, and remain, raised."[68]

So apparently Lyotard finds himself facing once more the – already rejected – solution of an aestheticising indifferentism, of the free parodic expression of libidinal fluxes. But he is absolutely determined to expose the inconsistency and unacceptability of this solution. In fact he writes, when introducing one of his books: "Today, life is fast. It vaporizes morality. Futility suits the postmodern, for words as well as things. But that doesn't keep us from asking questions: how to live, and why? The answers are deferred. As they always are, of course. But this time, there is a semblance of knowing: that life is going every which way.

But do we know this? We represent it to ourselves rather. Every which way of life is flaunted, exhibited, enjoyed for the love of variety. The moral of all morals would be that of the 'aesthetic' pleasure. (…) You're not done living because you chalk it up to artifice."[69]

On the other hand, it seems that his only alternative is the perspective of a vague and ineffective critique in the historical and political sphere, the perspective, which is also – in another sense – aestheticising and maybe mystical, of the nostalgia for the absolute. In fact, in the same book, Lyotard writes: "If *phrazein*, to phrase, to make a silent sign, is the only means of signalling itself that can be attributed to the absolute, I imagine the philosopher in the megalopolis being given over to phrasophilia. This would be the philosopher's (unworldly) way of being in the world. In no way a form of retreat or ivory tower. Nor is it commitment, public manifestos or declarations – except insofar as the probity expected of any citizen requires it. Even less is this the obscure return to theologies and cults.

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[66] Cfr. *supra*, p. 151.

[67] J.-F. LYOTARD, *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1979, p. 103; Eng. trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press 1984, p. 63.

[68] J.-F. LYOTARD, J.-L. THÉBAUD, *Au juste. Conversations*, cit., pp. 128f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 66f.

[69] J.-F. LYOTARD, *Moralités postmodernes*, Éditions Galilée, Paris 1993, p.11; Eng. trans. G. Van Den Abbeele, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1997, p. VIII.

Rather, it would be squint-eyed look at the visible, divergent enough to glimpse what is not visible there. An ear deaf enough not to be seduced by the melody and harmony of forms, but fine enough to take in pitch and nuance. Impassive before the seductions of the aestheticizing megalopolis, but affected by what they conceal in displaying it: the mute lament of what the absolute lacks."[70]

So in order not to give up on Lyotard's attempt, which I consider very important, to rescue postmodern culture from the monopoly of the cynical and anarchical theory of the free flow of instincts and to programmatically give it an application, a "leading thread," for the ethical choice, for the historical judgement and the political action, it is necessary to look for other references and suggestions. I propose to turn to Hermann Cohen's philosophy to find fruitful inspiration. He undoubtedly was a totally rationalist, idealist and modern philosopher. However, I have claimed and discussed above the reasons why his philosophy cannot in any way be reduced to that thought of identity and of representation that postmodern culture can no longer accept.[71] Until my argumentations are proven wrong or inconsistent, I will consider myself allowed to refer to Cohen's philosophy as an inspiration for a critical reflection in the context of postmodern culture.

I believe the reference to Cohen about the matter discussed here is quite interesting; in his aesthetical theory he distances himself from Kant and develops his own original consideration, precisely in relation to some aspects – which instead were taken up and emphasised by Lyotard – that characterise Lyotard's path. First of all, Cohen rejects the Kantian coordination of the sublime and the beautiful, and immediately corrects it including the sublime in the beautiful as its "minor term" (*Unterbegriff*); secondly, he negates the peculiar relationship between the sublime and morality, and rather establishes a preferential relationship between the sublime and intellectual knowledge; finally, he does not enhance the exceeding, absolutely transcendent character of the sublime, but he rather restricts it, establishing an inseparable bond between the sublime and its immanent presentation through humour, which is the other minor term of the beautiful, in which the prevailing feature is the relationship with morality, the experience of realisation and fulfilment, the dimension of the presentation and realisation of the Idea within the finiteness of the existing world. According to Cohen, Kant does not have a univocal and satisfactory position as far as the relationship of the beautiful with knowledge and morality is concerned. In fact on the one hand, on the basis of an intellectualistic interpretation of the beautiful, which relates it exclusively to the faculty of representations, he underestimates the relationship between the beautiful and morality, to the point where he has to put the sublime next to the beautiful – externally and in an unresolved coordination – as a moment of art, a bearer of ethical values. On the other hand, in order to keep alive the ineliminable need to establish a relationship between the beautiful and moral values, he overturns the essentially intellectualistic interpretation of the beautiful from which he started, considering the beautiful a symbol of

[70] *Ibid.*, pp. 35f., Eng. trans. cit., pp. 30f.

[71] Cf. Theme I, Cadenza I.

morality: a confusion of the aesthetical ideal and the ethical ideal that threatens the autonomy of aesthetics from ethics.[72]

In his aesthetical theory, instead, Cohen sets the beautiful as the only "superior principle" (*Oberbegriff*) of aesthetical production[73]; then, he considers the sublime and humour complementary "subordinate concepts," essential and inseparable moments of the beautiful.[74] As for the relationship of pure feeling with knowledge and morality, the latter are the permanent conditions of aesthetical production, as both its material and its method, without it losing its originality. In fact feeling, which always also accompanies the practical and theoretical activity of conscience as an "annex," plays an independent productive role in the aesthetical activity as "pure feeling," which can produce a new object of its own, starting from the objects of science and morals. This feeling is "love," and its object ("the nature of man and the man of nature") is actually produced in the form of "figure" by art. This way, by means of a production of the object, the subject itself, man as an individual, is produced.

The sublime, as it tends towards the infinite, has a prevalent relationship with the theoretical task of knowing the universal, whereas humour, as recognition of the immanent infinite value of finite reality, has a prevalent relationship with the ethical task of realising the infinite within finiteness. This is a manifestation of a general setting of Cohen's thinking, which strongly underlines that ethics is also a realisation of the Idea in historical and political action as well as the inner continuity between transcendental foundation and historical realisation. In his *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Cohen vehemently states: "*The deeper meaning of purity is in the applicability*, in the production of being, as application of the pure concept. The application of purity aims to concrete reality, but the purity thus implements a *radical change* of this reality;"[75] and below, in the same work, he adds: "Does the positive meaning of purity not reside in fruitful application? Pure will demonstrates in ethics its logical value only if this purity is applied to the subject of will and action, if it shows in nature and history."[76] In art, the task of realising the ideal is presented – through humour – in the figure of actual fulfilment, of the "the end of endless work done under the sign of conclusion," of the "end of struggle in victory and peace."[77] An interesting thing to add is that, in humour, the experience of the fulfilment and of the realisation of infinity is not referred to an indefinite, merely regulative horizon, but is the actual anticipation of peace in the feeling of the individual. In fact, humour is

[72] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil: Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, 2 Bde, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1912; repr. in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bde 8/9, 1982, Bd.I(8), pp. 100ff.

[73] Cf. *ibid.*, Bd. I(8) I, p. 250;Bd. II(9) pp. 417f.

[74] Cf. *ibid.*, Bd. I(8), pp. 347f.

[75] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1904, 1907[2]; the latter edition is reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bd. 7., 1981, p. 391.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 436.

[77] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil: Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, 2 Bde, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1912; repr. in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bde 8/9, 1982, Bd.I(8), p. 275.

not the fulfilment of the artwork, but rather the "fiction"[78] (which does not mean false appearance, but "hypothesis"), the sentimentally experienced awareness of fulfilment as the source of artistic production. Just like the sublime, in fact, humour is not the result of the artwork, but rather the principle of its production: the feeling of the fulfilment does not originate from fulfilment in the artwork, but precedes it and makes it possible.

Because of this character of feeling of fulfilment and realisation, humour protects the aesthetical feeling from the danger of translating the tension towards infinity, which is typical of the sublime, into irony and contempt for the finite: humour is the strong bulwark against scepticism and pessimism. Humour is a kind look upon the finite, the flawed, the ugly, which can see the reality of the ideal in it and in its own limits. This, furthermore, allows Cohen to develop an aesthetics of the ugly, which is founded on the – extremely powerful and interesting – statement that the object of art is not the beautiful, but the ugly: "This is the essential task of art, not to cover or superficially mask the relationship of man, in all his culture, with the animal world. This bond is presented in a threatening manner for every veracity of art by the ugly. This task is a task of the beautiful.

Can the ugly be a problem of the beautiful? Humour gives and founds the answer. The ugly does not remain ugly: it becomes a stage of the beautiful; it is a stage of the beautiful. The beautiful in itself is not an object of art: it is just an idea, just the general exigency and trust, the methodical task of pure feeling. This aim is achieved primarily through the sublime; but in an equally necessary manner through humor. Because man's nature shows itself broadly and convincingly in ugliness. Love would not be true if it didn't want to embrace the ugly as well. Love embraces it, transforms it: makes of it a moment of beauty. Love understands the ugly by permeating it with its power. Thus the satyr becomes eros. *Love ennobles the animal making him a man*."[79]

After this rough outline of some elements of Cohen's aesthetic theory, let us go back to the main topic. Humour, in fact, is an aesthetic concept in Cohen, and as such I have presented it here. How can it be significant in relation to the problem of the historical-political judgement on right and wrong? I believe Cohen himself gives an answer to this question; in a passage of the last chapter of his *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* – a passage that resembles in many ways the paragraph in Kant's *Der Streit der Fakultäten* commented on by Lyotard – he presents humour with all the characteristics of the "sign of history," which Lyotard, following Kant, links to enthusiasm instead. Cohen writes: "Peace in the joy of the feast is a characteristic of the Jewish mentality. Considering the suffering that pervades the whole historical life of the Jew, it is surely a wonder that he could continually maintain such equanimity, such a genuine humor, without which he would never have been able to lift himself again and again from the deepest humiliations to proud heights. The Jewish holidays have brought about this wonder for him. On the Sabbath and on the feasts, joy governed the Ghetto no matter how much suffer-

[78] *Ibid.*, Bd. I(8), p. 271.

[79] *Ibid.*, Bd.I(8), pp. 288f.

ing had embittered the days of the week. Joy on a holiday was a religious duty, and hence it became an inviolable and vital power in the Jewish."[80]

I believe the analogies between this passage and the one in Kant's *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, to which Lyotard refers, are quite manifest. Also here there is a *Begebenheit,* an "act of delivering itself" (*un "fait à se livrer")*, "the chance of a 'draw'" (*une "donne"*),[81] which is a *Geschichtszeichen*, a "sign of history" (*signe d'histoire*): "*signum rememorativum*, *demonstrativum*, *prognosticum*,"[82] in the sense well described by Lyotard: "What is delivered in this *Begebenheit* is thus a tension of the *Denkungsart* on the occasion of an object that is almost pure disorder, which is devoid of figure, which is really big however in historical nature, which is something abstract, rebellious to any function or presentation, be it analogical. But on account of these negative properties of the object that provide the occasion for this tension, it only proves even more indubitably, by the very form it impresses on feeling, that is polarized '*aufs Idealische*,' toward something ideal, *und zwar rein Moralische*, that is, something purely moral."[83] This "sign of history," moreover, since it reveals the "moral character" of mankind, "it is already" the realisation of which it is sign "within the limits that the present ascribes to the capacity for progress (*dans les limites que le présent fixe à la capacité en progrès*)."[84]

Humour is a sign of what? Of what sense or ideal of history? Cohen believes humour is a sign of peace, both as an ideal and as the driving force of history: "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Eternal … and I will heal him' (Isa 57:19). Peace was the healing power of the prophets, peace first of all in opposition to war, but then also in opposition to human passion. Peace has the same significance as reconciliation and redemption (...). The Jew could never remain a man of mourning; his feasts and his scholarly character always elevated him into the heaven of joy. This elevation was effected by peace, as a power of the soul, which became for the Jew as natural a way of life as justice and faithfulness,

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[80] H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, hg. von Benzion Kellermann, Fock, Leipzig 1919; hg. von Bruno Strauss, J. Kaufmann, Frankfurt a.M. 1929; repr. J. Melzer, Köln 1959, p. 170; Eng. trans. S. Kaplan, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., New York 1972, pp. 458f.

[81] Cf. I. KANT, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 7., p. 84; H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1902, 1914[2]; this latter edition is reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Georg Olms, Hildesheim-New York, Bd. 6, 1977, p. 55. For the translation I have used, here and below, Lyotard's terms: cf. J.-F. LYOTARD, *L'enthousiasme. La critique kantienne de l'histoire*, cit., p. 55; Eng. trans. cit., p. 27.

[82] Cf. I. KANT, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 7., p. 84; H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, cit., p. 56.

[83] J.-F. LYOTARD, *L'enthousiasme. La critique kantienne de l'histoire*, cit., p. 66; Eng. trans. cit., p. 33.

[84] I. KANT, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 7., p. 85; J.-F. LYOTARD, *L'enthousiasme. La critique kantienne de l'histoire*, cit., pp. 58, 75ff.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 28.

and as the courage for martyrdom. His martyrdom gave him tragic dignity, his peace, however, always maintained his aesthetic humor."[85]

Unlike the sublime, humour has an intrinsic relationship with the ethical realisation of the ideal. Of course it is an aesthetical feeling, separate from ethics; however its relationship with the ethical virtue of *Humanität*, and also with the religious virtue of "peace," is close and intense.

In his *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Cohen presents *Humanität* firstly as the virtue that enables judgement on a particular case, historical-political judgement: this is precisely the answer to the issue of the political judgement raised by Lyotard, that is, the ability to discern right from wrong, "*coup par coup*," in concrete particular cases. Cohen writes: "Justice is the virtue of the ideal,"[86] and this is its greatness but also its limit. Due to this peculiar character, in fact, justice cannot per se give sufficient consideration to the particular case. Cohen writes: "The point is that *reality* itself, with its peculiar and specific traits, looses value in front of the ideal, and therefore also loses interest in the virtue of the ideal. The idealistic interest in ethicality, which goes together with justice, appears endangered, it appears blurred, as soon as one cultivates and defends any particular interest in reality. Then the ideal appears to be removed. And yet *the particular and concrete case* requires an evaluation, a treatment, to which justice itself doesn't seem able to do justice."[87]

The *Humanität* therefore is the critical consideration represented by the "impenetrable sphinx of the particular."[88] In the form of "equity," the Roman *aequitas*, it consists in the critical consideration of the law, not from the outside, but as an essential part of the law, both as a necessary means for the demonstrative process in applying the law and as a juridical principle in itself. As far as the first meaning is concerned, Cohen writes: "The concept of the particular makes it logically necessary that positive law recognizes equity as its integration, as integration of the law, and therefore as itself a king of law, not for its general juridical principles, but to administer justice, and therefore to *provide the demonstrations that guide the ascertainment of the law*. There is no longer any contradiction, now, in the fact that there has to be an integration of the law and, at the same time, there has to be a law; the integration, in fact, concerns *not the juridical principle* – as if it had to make it better and more just – but only the juridical demonstration. Which has to be well aware of the fact that, according to logic, only the concept of the particular allows for a correct subsumption of the singular within the universal."[89] As for the second, a few lines below he adds: "Is justice alone truly able to regulate relations between men prescinding from other virtues? We have already seen what difficulties justice meets as a virtue *of the ideal*. But it's a consideration I made only as regards the ineliminable distance of concrete reality, with its particularities, from the ideal. If we pre-

[85] H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, cit., p. 530; Eng. trans. cit., p. 459.

[86] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., p. 617.

[87] *Ibidem*.

[88] *Ibid*., p. 620.

[89] *Ibidem.*

scind from this difficulty, another doubt arises on the sufficiency of justice. Justice strives for *equality*, and what gives it momentum is honour. Equity, in the Latin expression *aequitas*, serves as its significant memento. *Aequitas* means equality, as if one wished to indicate that the strict law in itself may never get to the equality it nevertheless aspires to. This criticism extends to the entire problem of justice. The other affection is felt, and submits its peculiar needs, its peculiar law. Not only the juridical demonstration undergoes new criticism, but also the juridical principle."[90]

The meaning of *Humanität* includes this juridical function of equity, but it is not only that. *Humanität* is the crucial virtue for the relationship among individuals, for the ethical – and therefore also political – action towards other individuals. In this sense it precedes judgement, is independent from it and at the same time it exerts a critical control over justice itself. *Humanität*, in fact, "is necessary because, even if equality became superfluous for the law, private human relationships would have to find a way of virtue marked by the fundamental independence from the judgment of these relations, *by the striving of will and action for a relation that leaves judgment aside*."[91] In fact all virtues are unilateral, including justice.[92] *Humanität* is the virtue whose goal is "*that this unilaterality of all virtues, or rather, of the concept of virtue, is made the object of ethical knowledge, and therefore of self-knowledge*."[93] As "awareness of the unilaterality of all virtues," *Humanität* "shows the inner contradictory nature of the highest forms of ethicality, such as religion and the homeland, it discovers their *illusory* and dazzling appearance when they violate the essential and authentic concept of man."[94] It is therefore "the instance of control towards all virtues."[95] Because of this meaning, *Humanität* makes it possible to accede to an ethical and political dimension that is more original and fundamental than the juridical one, which represents an undeniable condition and an orienting rule for the latter as well: the dimension of the "*striving of will and action for a relation that leaves judgment aside*."[96] In fact, Cohen writes: "only with this self-knowledge can one begin to correct the unilaterality, so that it will no longer be uncritically overestimated. We must strive not only to limit the pedantic point of view of the virtues, but also to get rid of this limitation. Only thus can ethical self-consciousness earn back a free space, becoming the *principle of determination* of the special task of man. This task, in fact, is not at all about judging the Other, but especially and exclusively about *dealing* with the Other, in exercising an ethical action towards him."[97]

In this sense of "courtesy" (*Freundlichkeit*),[98] in which feeling and duty are reconciled, *Humanität* enables the realisation of the relationship among individu-

[90] *Ibid.*, pp. 621f.

[91] *Ibi*d., p. 623.

[92] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 625.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 623.

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 628.

[95] *Ibidem*.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 623.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 624.

[98] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 627f.

als beyond and before the reciprocal judgement, because "it doesn't know the anxiety of choice."[99] Here its similarity to humour is evident; Cohen writes: "In courtesy, what shines is *the face of man*; in this face, courtesy can be discerned even in the shadow of its negation."[100] In this sense *Humanität* is also the strongest and safest guarantee for the differences, the minorities, against any totalitarianism, against Terror. Cohen writes: "Humanity is also felt within the state. Modesty is also involved here, but its discretion, here, is not enough. Only humanity is capable of warning more specifically about pride and arrogance against the weakest political opponent, as well as about diminishing, offending – by casting suspicion upon him – the stronger opponent. The will of the State can only be expressed through the majority. Faced with this necessity, humanity becomes the *defender of minorities*. It holds the helm with the strength of human feeling; it waives any sagacious political judgment, any deep political wisdom; it despises the alleged *reason of state* defending the highest purposes that would be beyond the law. It does not think about the future, which men ingeniously pretend to judge; its pulse beats for the present. It does not count, neither the voices nor the heads. Only man arouses its sympathy, which is more than compassion."[101]

All these meanings of *Humanität* are summed up in the final meaning of harmony and peace: "Humanity brings to action and weighting the peace and *serenity* that come from giving up judging. And by this waiver the ethical judgment becomes free of that skeptical fallibility of thought that characterizes it still. Mankind thus acquires a freedom, a sovereignty, that seem to be able to do without the ethical judgment. But this can be very dangerous, and therefore this appearance – which, besides, is derived from a right consideration – must be destroyed. If humanity means a virtue that has the task of showing the unilaterality of all virtues, it then leads to the limit of an idea that is in fact the limit of ethics.

The idea of harmony (...) *it is this limit idea of ethics*."[102]

Since it is the feeling of realisation of the ethical ideal, *Humanität* is "the virtue of art,"[103] it "opens up (...) the perspective from ethics to aesthetics,"[104] and at the same time it goes back to religion, in which its meaning is finally fulfilled. As Cohen observes in *Religion der Vernunft*, "the Bible calls this harmonisation of the whole of morality [the *Humanität*] peace."[105]

In the faith in God, in religious correlation, the aesthetical anticipation of peace finds the strength of historical realisation and becomes "contentment" (*Zufriedenheit*),[106] that is, the calm certainty of the complete realisation of the ideal

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 627.

[100] *Ibidem*.

[101] *Ibid.*, pp. 629f.

[102] *Ibid.*, pp. 632f.

[103] *Ibid*., p. 634.

[104] *Ibid*., p. 636.

[105] H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, cit., p. 516; Eng. trans. cit., p. 446.

[106] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 518 *passim*; Eng. trans. cit., p. 449 *passim*.

as the driving force of the historical action of the individual; Cohen writes: "Peace, as the highest goal of man, is at the same time the highest strength of man. Peace as a way of virtue is the final step in the development of man. Peace is perfection. Self-perfection is on the track of the final goal when it reaches the peace of the soul."[107]

In religious correlation the longing (*Sehnsucht*) for the ideal, which finds its own complete fulfilment in art only *in figura* through humour, acquires the solidity of faith and the effective strength of realisation, because in it the transcendence becomes an attribute of God and the ideal, good or sanctity, can therefore be brought back to a homogeneity in relation to the individual and her historical action. In religious correlation, the anticipation of the ideal becomes the strength of historical action: "The fundamental power of the human soul is as certainly peace, as peace is the goal of human history."[108]

So humour, and not enthusiasm, is the "sign of history," the "*signum rememorativum*, *demonstrativum*, *prognosticum*," which not only makes it possible to glimpse the meaning of history, but is itself a realisation of it. According to Kant's – over-simplified – classification, humour certainly does not belong to the affections of a "languid type," but rather to those of a "strenuous type," as it "excites the consciousness of our power of overcoming every resistance"[109] (the expression "*humeur sublime*" is acceptable in this sense only).[110] Humour, however, is not the sublime; rather, it is a complement of the sublime: it is not the tension towards the infinity of the Idea, but the ability to see – with a benevolent and anticipating look, supported by trust and peace – the effective realisation of the Idea itself in the faulty reality of finiteness. Precisely this anticipation of the fulfilment, which is ethical in *Humanität*, aesthetical in humour and religious in contentment, is the strength that sustains ethical and political action. It is humour that "renders the power to struggle" against "a disgust for history and the abandonment of thought," that opposes to the "indifferentism of the 'It's all the same'" and to the "melancholia of the 'We don't matter'," trusting in the fact that not only everyone is "capable" of it, but that it "must be cultivated."[111]

In the postmodern condition the problem of "culture" (*Bildung*) arises once more. A historical condition – social, political and economic – does not necessarily produce a culture, nor is culture identical to the historical condition, otherwise culture would lose its fundamental critical meaning. The postmodern condition, characterised by the end of the great narratives, by the decoded flux of instincts inaugurated by capitalism, by the almost irreversible mistrust in any dogmatic and totalitarian certainty, can itself produce a culture, or not. The men of this epoch and, among them, the "critical philosophers" have the task of finding the right way and taking it. I believe the right way cannot be that of indifferentism and aesthetical

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 518; Eng. trans. cit., p. 449.

[108] *Ibid.*, p. 525; Eng. trans. cit., p. 454.

[109] Cf. I. KANT, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 5.,p. 272; Eng. trans. cit., p. 125.

[110] J.-F. LYOTARD, *L'enthousiasme. La critique kantienne de l'histoire*, cit., p. 103; Eng.trans. cit. p. 58.

[111] Cf. *ibidem*.

cynicism of libidinal economy, which Lyotard rejected as well, but it cannot be the escape in the parathetic sublime of the heterogeneity of languages either. *Humanität ou barbarie*. *Humanität*, by preceding the judgement about right and wrong, makes it possible and orients it. Anticipating peace and harmony, which are invisible, *Humanität* enables the historical action towards the imperfect reality struggling amidst chaos and conflict. It is free from doctrinal certainties, and it is capable of "discerning, respecting and making respected the differends,"[112] critical but not destructive towards the present.

Today as never before, we must try to build a culture in absence of the Idea. But if the Idea, though absent and neither representable nor presentable, still has to be the rule to orient the judgment and the ethical and political action, a *Sehnsucht* for the Idea must be cultivated, a presence of its absence, which must not be aimless longing, the "mute lament of what the absolute lacks,"[113] but an active ethical orienting in history, whose strength comes from the faithful anticipation of the fulfilment of the realisation of the ideal. In this sense, I believe, taking inspiration from Cohen, it is possible to suggest humour as a "sign of history."

[112] *Ibid.*, p. 114; Eng. trans. cit. p. 67.

[113] J.-F. LYOTARD, *Moralités postmodernes*, cit., p. 36.

Cadenza 3
The End of the Sacrificial Foundation
Michel Serres' Dream

In *Rome. The first book of foundations*[1], Michel Serres analyses history in depth, starting from a free and creative review of the first book of Titus Livius's *Ab Urbe condita*. In his book, Michel Serres recalls René Girard's famous theories on violence and sacrifice and openly declares to have learned from him the "true ideas developed here."[2] He then uses these ideas in an independent and original way in order to describe history as it is usually conceived – that is, as the history of the foundation and thus of the sacrificial violence from which one must emancipate and free oneself. Serres' reference to the two versions of Remo's death summarizes Girard's lesson: "The hatred between brothers goes to the point of murder. This hatred between twins grows like ivy in the group; it goes toward extinction, and there is no foundation unless, stopping the reciprocal throat-slitting, the crowd turns against one of them. René Girard's lesson, the schema he has proposed makes these two contradictory stories compatible; it even makes them complementary. The fight between twins is an operator; the death in the middle of the mob is a point of articulation. The former is a motor force of a time and the latter is the end of a time and the beginning of another. Hence the reference point for the foundation."[3]

As I said, Serres does not simply want to describe the traditional conception of history as the history of the foundation and sacrificial violence. In fact, he clearly and radically rejects this conception and contemplates an alternative. With his imaginative and particularly rich style, Serres expresses both these aspects in the form of a dream: "A question, a worry, a dream: what if the compass, true geometral, or compass rose, placed there, was not only passive but active; what if it was a rudder? What if the legend was a machine for infinitely copying the legend? Hercules kills

[1] M. SERRES, *Rome. Le livre des fondations*, Bernard Grasset, Paris 1983; Eng. trans. by Randolph Burks, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2015.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 7; Eng. trans. cit., p. V.

[3] *Ibid*., pp. 114f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 91f.

A. Poma, *Cadenzas*, Studies in German Idealism 18,
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Cacus, Romulus kills Remus… and Brutus kills Caesar... a nightmare. Dream: what if the legend contained a productive agency, a Herculean force, an agency of replication, the printer of the cattle's hooves, and an agency of control, I mean the king-writer, Evander, who judges who is god and who murderer? What if the legend was a geometral machine automatically indexing all the history to follow? And what if all history, mechanically, crazily, repeated the legend, slightly inclined in one direction? I'm dreaming, of course; I'm doing nothing but dreaming. What if the abominable horror, the long river of blood and tears, had been programmed, in the middle of the cartouche, in that appalling self-replicating automatic machine? And what if, on the contrary, I was lucid, and it was this that was our nightmare? And it was this that was our illusion of history? And what if we – hallelujah (*Noël!*) – had freedom to fix the rudder anew, to change course on the rose of the legend, what if we could rewrite the program, another time in a completely different direction, renaissance?"[4]

According to Serres, this dream is also a question and a worry. Most of all, this dream has two faces: it is a nightmare (unconscious or lucid) in which history is a continuous repetition of the same violent and sacrificial event, and it is a liberating vision, the renaissance in a new history. Here, I will try to briefly summarize these two dimensions and reflect on Serres' new programme.

The historical narrative aims to go back to the origin – the foundation – and rebuild from here the linear sequence and meaning of events. However, this analytical operation (which presents itself as knowledge and explanation of the events) is actually based on an essential concealment of reality in its true original state. In this state, reality is an indefinite and chaotic multiplicity in which all events are subject to every meaning and its opposite, but in which every possibility is and remains unconditionally open. Analytical knowledge, establishing a unique meaning of the events, hides all the other possible meanings: it ignores by knowing. On the contrary, the obscure understanding (respectful of the chaotic multiplicity of reality, of the *noise*) because of its obscurity and uncertainty, captures the indeterminate truth, full of each possibility and reality. Serres writes: "When you aren't white, a determination appears, a mark or a sign. Determination is negative; if you are king, here and now, you aren't an ox or a shepherd or a hero. Indetermination is positive. White is the indeterminate, the limit of the underdetermined, the whole of the positive. You are white – yes, yes, yes – you are every possible world. Leibniz had possible worlds be visited in a pyramid; the pyramid is fire, the fire is white light.

In the beginning is the black box, ignorance, our zero of information. In the beginning is the white, every possible world. In the beginning is the victim, this relation of substitution, and this death, between us."[5]

The *noiseuse* reality, multiple and undetermined, is run through by violence: everyone can be a victim and a murderer. The founding work of history conceals this reality by building a linear and continuous succession of events through the sanctification of the sacrificial victim. Evander, writing, the "good man," the "his-

[4] *Ibid*., p. 45; Eng. trans. cit. p. 31. Brackets added (*Noël* appears in the original).

[5] *Ibid*., p. 44; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 30f.

torical man," set up "an altar, a temple, at the murder site, the greatest of altars even, the Altar Maxima. And this was the first sacrifice, where the cattle were killed in Hercules' stead."[6]

History is therefore the history of the foundation. Paradoxically, however, the historical foundation does not reveal the origin but rather conceals it: "So the origin is the point beyond which there is some interest in not tracing back."[7] This concealment of the original murder, by which the undifferentiated multitude finds its unity and identity, occurs via sacralisation: "the sacralization (...) stops the violence and renders blind to the origin."[8]

This sacrificial and sacred dynamic of the foundation never ceases to repeat itself. It is not the beginning, but the overcoming of the community's crisis that repeats itself, always the same, and occurs by discharging violence on a scapegoat that is then removed through sacralisation. The history of the foundation is actually a history of the foundations that repeat themselves, always the same, in a sacred stillness that immobilizes time in an eternal return of violence and the sacred. Serres writes: "Once the foundation of Rome is defined, we must define the path along which, precisely, it never ceases to take place. This path defines a time, the primary time of history: the constitution of a collective, of its elementary form, constitution and disaggregation (...).

This path is that of *fundamental history*, of history defined by the series of foundations. The crowd forms in a ring; the crowd breaks up; the people flee; the crowd forms again. The multiple lets its fundamental beating be seen. The deep pulsing in the heart of his black box, of the city and of the people of Rome (...). Crisis is the moment when a multiplicity no longer has confidence in its objects. It changes, it is going to change quasi-objects, the objects that creates its social relations. The crisis is one of objective transubstantiation. This is fundamental time; it runs from founding murder to founding murder.

Each founding murder imposes a discontinuity, a break. Conversely, the break is barbarous, and every theory that lets it be seen is a theory of the sacred. Not of science, but of the sacred.

These breaks are all the same, of a bleak repetitiveness. Being killed, killing, carving up, stoning. It is understood that the death instinct is iteration, and conversely. The fundamental time of history is marked by death. It appears to be discontinuous, but it is merely the time of the Eternal Return."[9]

History is the history of the foundation and, as such, it is the history of the foundations. It is the history of the eternal return of the identical – that is, of violence against the sacrificial victim, of its elimination, expulsion, exclusion, which, through sacralisation, is concealed forever, ignored by knowledge and buried under the foundations of what should be a linear, clear and continuous historical event. The sacred foundation of history scandalously removes the sacrificial violence from

[6] *Ibid*., p. 22; Eng. trans. cit., p. 12.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 33; Eng. trans. cit., p. 22.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 50; Eng. trans. cit., p. 36.

[9] *Ibid*., pp. 117f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 94f.

memory. Serres writes: "Rome enters into history, at least we think so. I mean: if we are in history, and we do think so, Roma must be as well, for we entered it thanks to it as well in those days. Yet Rome is mired in the sacred. Its feet are tied up in the snares of the sacred. Blind, its attempts to free itself are visible; it is inexorably brought back. Drugged, intoxicated with violence, it can't escape the sacred. The eternal return is exactly the return of the sacred, the return of the forgotten, of the buried, the return to the light of the head with the intact face at the top of Capitoline Hill."[10]

Serres rebels against this history of which men are, at the same time, the offspring and the responsible prosecutors. His dream of a new history and thought of history stems from the rejection and condemnation of sacrificial violence and its sanctification, which current history is based on whilst concealing it: "We no longer tolerate the thanatocracy or its acts, its discourses or the culture it brings about. The hatreds it spreads, the disputes, polemics, divisions, powers, resemble each other. The culture founded on death only returns to death, repetitively. The knowledge founded on murder returns to murder multiplied by knowledge. This multiplication was strong enough recently to absorb all that exists. Today we are at the point of no return. We have returned to the time of foundation, crushed by the thanatocracies of irrationality and rationality. We want to avoid a new repetition of the identical ancestral gesture. A city, science or knowledge that would no longer be founded, like ours, on death and destruction remains to be founded.

We no longer have anything but this work, apart from the dismal repetitions of history."[11]

In this conversion to a radical newness, in this "renaissance," lies the true meaning of culture: "Culture is, quite simply, the distance from this foundation, barbarous.

Are we so sure of being so far from this centre, well, or black hole that we are never caught in it? We are, quite to the contrary, assured of the contrary. Atrocious returning ghosts sometimes called reason or the work of history, the foundation and its barbarous gestures never cease to repeat themselves, sacred. Can we imagine a distancing that would be definitive and without return? Can we conceive that culture begins? It has perhaps begun without our knowing. We have heard an explosion into parts, universal, and all our work is to avoid its return… ."[12]

The real culture, to which one must try to give voice so that it can produce a new history, cannot be anything but freedom. As Serres notes "'I am free' always means: I can finally not fight." He then goes on explaining: "I have never fought. The first condition for thinking remains the freedom of thought. There is no freedom in battle, which closes third ways, the inventive ways. I want to stay free, an educated third."[13]

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[10] *Ibid*., p. 121; Eng. trans. cit., p. 97.

[11] *Ibid*., pp. 113f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 91.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 122; Eng. trans. cit., p. 98.

[13] *Ibid*., pp. 172 and 173; Eng. trans. cit., p. 143.

Thus, Serres' dream of history presents itself as a political programme for a new non-violent and non-sacred culture: "We will have ended up making an entire generation believe that all this furious madness of fighting to the death, of wars with millions of deaths, of fierce competition, blood and tears, that all this madness of slaughter, collective or familial, is the real, is the depths of the real. And what if on the contrary history, and the imbecilic hierarchies, and the absurd race for power, and the accounts of the economy, and murders were only nightmares next to which the Latinius' dream, yours and mine, would be ordinary and simple realities? And what if, for once, the dream explained what is prejudged to be real? And what if we reversed the direction of clarification?"[14]

However, to translate this dream into reality – to translate it into a new way of thinking about history and in a political program of emancipation from the sacrificial violence and the sacred concealment of truth – implies a real conversion and rebirth of thought itself, since the sacrificial mechanism is the driving force of both action and so-called rational thinking. As Serres observed: "What is writing a history? Livy answers: it's coding an indeterminate white space; it's determining it by force. And so concealing it."[15] The analytical and dialectical reason works by codifying the undetermined, by reducing multiplicity to unity, which inevitably happens through sacrificial violence and its sacral concealment. The concept itself, which is the essential structure of analytical and representational thinking, is nothing but determination and, at the same time, concealment of the substance – that is, the multiple and undetermined object hidden and buried beneath. Serres writes: "Substance is a concept. A concept subsumes the multiple under unity. The concept is royal, divine, heroic, that is to say victimary. For each of your concepts, tell the murderer who founds it. Substance is either the first or the last unity, hidden beneath, permanent across the diversity of attributes or accidents. Substance is royal, divine, heroic, that is to say sacrificial. The hero, the king, the god, the victim, the substance, the concept, these are unities founded beneath the volley of stones, the rumbling of the crowd and the peal of the thunder, these are unities of representation, the multiple by the one and the one by the multiple. Archaic and savage philosophy."[16] Likewise, the so-called dialectical movement (which identity stems from and founds itself on), the "work of the negative" through which thought should produce and understand the real, is nothing but the static and despotic power of the identical over the multiple, the strong over the weak, violence over the victim. The multiple is violently codified under the crush of unity and identity through dialectic. Hence Serres' disenchanted consideration: "Don't believe, if you are a little guy, that you will ever be the leader of the little guys. The position of leader of the little guys has long been held by the little guys of the great. The father of the masters is the master of the masters; the son of the masters is master of the slaves. Don't trust the dialectic, if you are little. The two-value dialectic, crude and rough is nothing but the logic of the masters. It has shown this well ever since it was invented. If you are humble,

[14] *Ibid*., p. 227; Eng. trans. cit., p. 188.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 57; Eng. trans. cit., p. 42.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 132; Eng. trans. cit., p. 107.

guard yourself, left and right, against every possible dialectic. It doesn't work for you; it's neither said nor made for you. It's the logic of immobility. Of stability, of repetition in the appearance of movement. It's the logic of empire. It is stupid. If you are little, be intelligent."[17]

The eternal return of sacrificial violence, which is the apparent movement of dialectic, is the inevitable consequence of a conception of reason as the principle of identity that excludes all otherness. The exclusion, expulsion and sacrifice of the other are a necessary condition so as to establish the one. The representative and dialectical reason is based on the principle of the excluded middle: "Polemic is the most atrocious of necessities; hell is the dialectic, which is the necessity of death, of destruction (…). The terror comes from the excluded middle; you don't have the choice; there is no third way."[18]

Recalling Leibniz and his famous metaphor based on the legend of Sextus Tarquinius, Serres gives a peremptorily negative description of modern reason as the reason of identity based on the principle of the excluded third – a logical and anthropological principle identical to the sacrificial procedure: "For the world to be created, violence has to be done to Sextus. And Sextus is the third. And Sextus is excluded.

There exists something rather than nothing. The reason for the coming into existence of these things is death or the exclusion of this Sextus. Of this third.

The principle of sufficient reason merges into the problem of evil. Reason is related to evil. They are both related to the excluded third."[19]

This logical principle – this horrible anthropological process, the sacrifice of the other, the exclusion of the third – is the very foundation of our comprehension and thinking, our writing and understanding each other, because our reason cannot stand indeterminacy, instability and indecision. In short, our reason cannot tolerate the chaotic multiplicity of reality.[20] Therefore, trying to think about a new reason (inclusive rather than exclusive), able to truly understand the multiple without reducing it to the identical, therefore free from the sacrificial violence and sacral concealment of it, Serres opposes the biblical tower of Babel to Leibniz's pyramid of the possible Sextus: "I understand why the tower of Babel remains without a top (*découronnée*); it is good that it remains so. If the tower of Babel were completed, it would be closed, in the unity of languages, in the unicity or accord of the logos, over the corpse of a Sextus, over the exclusion of a third again. No one is killed, no one excluded on top of the highest of the terraces in ruin, vertiginously overhanging the mixture of thoughts, the mêlée of languages, opening as many third ways as you please; the tower has remained open; society, as they say, is open; invention and freedom are open."[21]

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[17] *Ibid*., p. 161; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 132f.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 172; Eng. trans. cit., p. 142.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 170; Eng. trans. cit., p. 140.

[20] Cf. *ibid*., p. 171; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 141.

[21] *Ibid*., pp. 171f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 141f.

As mentioned above, this open freedom is the fundamental reference point for the new reason and the new history that Serres would like to inaugurate. This new reason will have to include – rather than exclude – the multiple, without reducing it to identity. It will have to use new logics: "logics of the included third,"[22] "soft logics,"[23] capable of understanding the non-standardized, chaotic and indeterminate multiple without fixing it into a concept and therefore interrupt its dynamism, without necessarily organizing its relations into the conflicting dialectical structure, without trying to force it into a unique and universal form.

Serres' dream is interesting because, despite fully adhering to the postmodern rejection of thought as identity and representation, it does not fall for the lures of irrationalism. Furthermore, the new rationalism that it pursues is no less rigorous than the previous one, and can better understand what the violent and sacrificial reason of identity conceals. Serres significantly distances himself from the general anti-Platonism of postmodern thought, being inspired by Plato himself in his conception of knowledge as a thought of unity, multiplicity and a "mixture" of the two.[24] In his previous works, Serres similarly pursued the idea of a reason capable of thinking about unity and multiplicity, order and chaos, and their mixture. In *Rome*, Serres openly states to be willing to apply this new reason to history. In fact, at the beginning of the book, Serres writes: "Another reason appears, ancient and new. Reason is not a law imposing itself on the illegal; it is not an order to which disorder must submit; that reason is pure hatred. Its true name is hatred and its final production is the monstrous, glaring bright god of hatred. Pure reason, pure hatred. Here is the work that the unity of redundancy and the non-standardized multiplicity have in common. I said in *Genesis* that their first encounter produced time. Reason is in this encounter and in this work, and unity can disappear into the cloud, as the multiple risks stiffening in repetition. The reason I'm invoking, ancient and new, is therefore triple: it is harmony, it is noise, it is their amalgam, their alloy, their moiré fusion, their crossing or cross-breeding, their musical temperament. A certain rationalism of old enjoyed eliminating, filtering out the multiple and confusion; it held a little less than a third of what it called the truth.

The multiple, crazy growth and the formation of form above this numerous bushing-out are formally described in the chain of *Genesis*. It is only a question here of an application."[25]

Serres uses images and allegories (the two Vestals' jars, one full and one empty;[26] Penelope who weaves at day and at night undoes her weaving;[27] the baker who stretches the dough, spreads it and then folds it, creating an aleatory path, and indeterminate and random ichnography[28]) in order to describe the programme of a rea-

[22] *Ibid*., p. 87; Eng. trans. cit., p. 67.

[23] *Ibid*., p. 238; Eng. trans. cit., p. 197.

[24] M. SERRES, *Genèse*, Bernard Grasset, Paris 1982, pp. 182–185.

[25] M. SERRES, *Rome. Le livre des fondations*, cit., pp. 15f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 5.

[26] *Ibid*., pp. 78ff; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 60ff.

[27] *Ibid*., pp. 84ff; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 65ff.

[28] *Ibid*., pp.87ff; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 68ff.

son capable of thinking unity, multiplicity, and their mixture at the same time; a reason that does not work by definitions and exclusions but by paths that are inventive, rigorous and yet open to the chaos of multiplicity; a reason that does not immobilize everything in the identical through the analytical reduction to a definition or concept, or through the dialectical negation that takes place in the conflict between thesis and antithesis. This is the specific task of the philosopher, who must therefore distance himself from any place for and technique of coding. Moreover, he must exercise the difficult freedom to think of the multiple. Serres writes: "I'm trying to think multiplicity in its difference and its fluctuations. I'm lost, without place, right in the very middle of the Northwest Passage, in an intermediary state between the sciences, in the fractal and multiple distribution of land, water, scattered ice and ice floe. I mean that I'm trying to be without speciality, in the fairly wide desert between the exact sciences and the social sciences, outside the very exactly divided space of classification. I believe that this place is one of the sites of philosophy today."[29]

To apply this new reason to history means to abandon the history of the foundation so as to understand the non-violent and non-sacrificial truth of the "non-founded city in the founded city."[30]

As we have seen, Rome is in some ways the model of a city founded on sacrificial violence, on the victimary killing during the monarchical era, on the expulsion of the excluded third during the Republican era. However, it is also the model of the non-founded city, of the multiplicity that is not reduced to identity during the imperial era. Serres writes: "Rome doesn't know the excluded middle or third, it wanted to exclude it."[31] Serres emphasizes Rome's peculiarity as a composite and plural society and recognizes in this feature, rather than in the repeated victimary foundations that it tries to build, the meaning of its history: "Rome does not strictly exist as a subject; Rome is an ichnography. Divide it up, and it is still Rome; a mixture can be divided up without ceasing to be a mixture; it can grow for the same reason.

I seriously believe that its history, its growth and power came from this inexistence. Everything squeezed like sardines in the stiffness of the excluded middle, every city surrounded by walls, every existent put in a closed system can only play stability, can only play by leaving time. It has been very profoundly said that India had abandoned history; this is due to the caste system, a fine lamination of the principle of the excluded middle. These beings play perfection; they play being; they play fixity; they play eternity. Rome was historical, it invented the time, not as a concept, but in the moving reality of the mixture."[32]

Foundation, thus, always occurs through the standardization of the multiple, the reduction to unity and identity, the sacrificial violence and sacralization that occults it. The new history, therefore, must first of all abolish the foundation. One must

[29] *Ibid*., p. 252; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 209f.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 263; Eng. trans. cit., p. 218.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 153; Eng. trans. cit., p. 126.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 154; Eng. trans. cit., p. 127.

therefore recognize that the origin of history is not the precise origin of a linear development, but rather the chaotic and indiscriminate multiple in which there is no definite sense – the "black box" of the multiple, which is also the "white box" of all the possibilities left open and free to develop in every direction. Serres writes: "In the beginning is the ichnography. That is to say, the integral, that is to say, the sum, the summary, the totality, the stock, the well, the set of meanings or directions. The possible, capacity. Each defined direction or meaning is only a scenography, that is to say, a profile seen from a certain site. From here, the narrative says that Cacus is bad, that Evander is the good man; from elsewhere, the narrative will say Evus and Cacander; from elsewhere still, it will have other and still other profiles; this is how things are with the meaning or direction of history: scenes. Scenes, therefore sites from which to see the representation. But the initial painting, but the original legend, but the legend that permits reading the foundation narrative, in beginning sets up the ichnography. Here is first and foremost the total painting of the possible. History ensues from it better than from one source."[33]

Starting from the undifferentiated multiplicity, history must unfold and be understood avoiding the violence of sacrificial exclusion, of the determinism that reduces to the unity of concept, of the limitation of possibilities to the dialectical conflict that consequently allows for the despotic subjugation of political power. History should not be conceived as one space for the dialectical conflict, both sterile and violent, but as a "landscape" of multiple and intricate spaces in which the right strategy is to continuously change game, space and rules.[34] Serres writes: "I see how history progresses; it progresses the way a fly flies. It's true that a fly progresses sometimes.

Having left, if you like, now, from here, from some space, whether real, represented or imaginary, history abruptly bifurcates under the attractive grip of a site that's become favourable or that rectifies with profit the contentious games of the first space; it halts for a long or short time, a flash, depending; it abruptly bifurcates under the attractive grip of a site that's suddenly become… ."[35]

One will be able to free oneself from violence and war only if one can think of history without foundation, exclusion, oppressive and repressive power, as the history of the non-standardized multiple. Serres' dream is therefore a conception of history as well as a political project. He writes: "When the collective is formed, when the city is founded, when a political state appears, a process of standardization begins. I'm seeking to think a prior non-standard state. The set there is not the same; it hasn't already been grasped in categories. Can ways other than these seizings or capturings be imagined? Can society, the social be thought otherwise than in sequential terms, as the very etymology of the word seems to urge? Can we reason directly in the non-standard model, in disequilibrium and not in a state? Can we think, without war, sets that would subsist without standardization? Utopia, or new reason? A more subtle and broader new reason, suppler in any case, than the repeti-

[33] *Ibid*., p. 32; Eng. trans. cit., p. 20.

[34] Cf. *ibid*., pp.182ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 151ff.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 189; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 156f.

tive and slightly stupid rationality of the standard models. Will this new reason free us from the repugnant and ancient alliance of violence and war with our old reason?"[36]

I would like to briefly take into consideration Serres' deep and fascinating vision so as to highlight and discuss some of its problems and therefore contribute, even if only little, to its development.

First of all, Serres sometimes seems to take for granted that one's "understanding" the victimary mechanism, which is the basis of historical "foundation," is enough to free oneself from it. He thus proves to agree with the great enlightened ideal that freedom occurs through knowledge. He points out: "Don't mistake me, I'm also for the light. Who isn't for light and science?"[37] In a comment on the Aventine secession, Serres explicitly indicates understanding as the key of the non-violent solution to this crisis and therefore as the beginning of a new non-violent history: "Of course the plague is violence, as the conspiracy was one of violence, as the work of all for a single person was through violence. How does one get out of this plague? The apologue gets out of it, because it doesn't budge.

Apparuisse. It appears. It becomes manifests. One gets out of it by understanding. The sole solution to this problem is to understand. To understand well what is happening and not to hide it."[38] However, Serres' conclusion is far more radical. According to him, the sole real alternative to the violent foundation is understanding: "The only trap is war; the only true trap is polemic; the only trap is hatred.

They understood, white light. They understood, and they didn't kill (...).

(…) They understood. And they did not found. They form a non-founded city in the founded city."[39]

Obviously, to understand and disclose the victimary mechanism is the first crucial step to abandon violence. Girard – who, as has been said, is Serres' main reference – also insists on the need to constantly unravel what the "texts of persecution" hide. However, according to Girard, one also needs a radical and ethical option for non-violence. Without it, the mere revelation of the victimary mechanism would indeed make the latter unable to function by producing peace-making effects of the community, but it would not prevent it from reproducing itself indefinitely, always removed and hidden by its false narratives.

In fact, Serres also thinks of a practical option for non-violence that would lead to the understanding of its hidden mechanism. However, he sometimes seems to consider that option as a spontaneous attitude of multiplicity, whenever this is not violently subjugated by unity and power. In several occasions, Serres recognised the violent nature of the undifferentiated multiplicity. Still, a sort of optimism about the state of nature – which I consider problematic – seems to prevail in his final vision.

In a comment on the formation of the Tiber island after Tarquinius Superbus's expulsion from Rome, Serres describes the Roman crowd pouring the wheat of the

[36] *Ibid*., p. 207; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 171f.

[37] *Ibid*., p. 85; Eng. trans. cit., p. 66.

[38] *Ibid*., pp. 275f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 214.

[39] *Ibid*., pp. 262f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 218.

Campus Martius into the bed of the Tiber, thus creating the Tiber island. This is a happy and peaceful crowd that, without choosing or discriminating, without determining or unifying, pours flows of harvest into the flow of water and sand. According to Serres, this gives rise to a new foundation of the city, a foundation without violence and without victims that does not immobilize but moves, and is itself a free and peaceful flow. Serres writes: "Contrary to the literature and experience, contrary to all good sense and all good philosophy, the crowd on that day didn't found on the solid. Doesn't a good foundation dig into rock or stone? It's not on a rock that the Church will be built, but on a man of flesh named Peter, on a decomposed body, on a metaphor, on a transport, a bringing, a carrying. The crowd therefore on that summer's day didn't found its temples on rock; it didn't found them on stone; it founded them on what melts. A good foundation occurs on what moves. The crowd founds the island on liquid, on the viscous, on the sandy, on the muddy banks."[40] Serres then concludes that: "Foundation is a thought, a practice of the moving. Of fusion and mixture. Of the multiplicity of times.

In the literal sense, yes, all foundation is current."[41]

The undifferentiated and undifferentiating multiple, which joins spontaneously and peacefully, is described as the alternative to the determination of multiplicity under unity that occurs through sacrificial violence. Serres' description assumes really irenic traits: "The crowd here is pouring wheat, unbeaten wheat, wheat not separated from its straw stalk. What then is this wheat, this harvest, what then is this that's flowing toward the Tiber?

This. What is it that the crowd is showing in silence in raising their baskets, in elevating the bottom of the panniers, in revealing their wicker bottoms?

This is the body.

The body of all the dead and all the murdered.

On that day, under the great summer sun, no one takes the place in the centre of the crowd; no one rolls, bleeding, in the field of violence; no torn apart victim descends down the bank, in tatters. On that day, the multitude only harvested wheat (...).

This is no one's body today, no one's blood: this is only wheat, this is only straw.

Peace."[42]

I find it necessary to point out that this is overly utopian. The peace and the nonviolence of the undifferentiated multiple left free to flow are the alternative to history as tragedy and concept – that is, as seizure of the multiple under the one through victimary violence[43]: "Let the multiple graze in peace; tragedy vanishes."[44]

Serres' analysis of violence, compared to Girard's, seems to concentrate more on the victimary mechanism partially untied by the mimetic mechanism of desire. As known, Girard thinks that violence is generated by the latter and in order to remedy

[40] *Ibid*., p. 276; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 228f.

[41] *Ibid*., p. 277; Eng. trans. cit., p. 229.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 279; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 231f.

[43] Cf. *ibid*., p. 281; Eng. trans. cit., p. 233.

[44] *Ibidem.*

the crisis of the produced undifferentiated, sacred communities implement the sacrificial mechanism that discharges violence on the scapegoat, thus preserving the community. It is certainly important to insist, as Serres does, on the violence of the historical unification of the community around the victim's sacrifice, on the violent and sacrificial foundation of history, and on the violence of thought as identity and representation. However, one cannot neglect the violence of the mimetic desire, of the undifferentiated multitude in anthropology, of irrational thought, of the rejection of all forms of determination and sense, of thought as wild energy. Here, too, in fact, violence is the dominant principle. Serres himself sometimes emphasizes the violent nature of the chaotic and undifferentiated original reality, the "black box." On the other hand, we have seen earlier that he does not at all support an irrationalistic programme. His ideal of knowledge is rather the ability to combine unity, multiplicity and their mixture; form, chaos and their coexistence. In his previous works, he convincingly described knowledge as an archipelago of small islands of orderly and rational knowledge submerged in an unfamiliar sea of disorder. He also proposed a new programme for reason and knowledge, which he then recalled in *Rome. The First Book of Foundation*: to understand order, disorder and their mixture.[45]

If this is true, then one must certainly share Serres' passionate rejection of history as violent eternal return of the sacrificial foundation and of reason as violent thought of identity. However, one cannot believe that the alternative is the uncritical reception of the undifferentiated anarchy and thought's renunciation of form and the determination of the concept and rational law; one cannot limit oneself to "What shoots like a geyser out of a fissure when the king is no longer there, or the consul or the hero or the concept, or any unity: pure multiplicity."[46]

The "new" history and the "new" thought must certainly not fall into the trap of the new foundation, as this would once again repeat sacrificial violence. They must be "new," that is, they must be the victim's voice, rather than the sacrificer's: the memory and vivid lesson of the previous victims may produce a history without new victims, as well as the conscious reason of the previous reduction of differences to the totalitarian identity can produce a non-totalizing thought. We must trace these voices in the tradition of our culture and refer to them so as to develop a new thought and a new history.

Serres certainly does not approve the idealistic tradition, although he actually criticizes either a pre-Kantian idealism of representation or Hegel's absolute and totalitarian idealism, or else the static idealism of structuralism. In my opinion, it would be more interesting to rediscover and update several important reflections on critical idealism. As I attempted to show elsewhere,[47] this rationalism is an alternative to – rather than part of – the thought of identity and representation. In this tradition, one can find several useful lessons to draw inspiration from, for the project mentioned above.

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[45] Cf., for example, M. SERRES, *Hermès V. Le passage du Nord-Ouest*, Les Éditions de Minuti, Paris 1980, pp. 23f., 64, 158f.

[46] M. SERRES, *Rome. Le livre des fondations*, cit., p. 281; Eng. tr. cit., p. 233.

[47] Cf. Theme I, Cadenza 1.

It may be astonishing – but also deeply interesting – that in Hermann Cohen's *Logic of Pure Knowledge*, a logical work inspired by the most classic critical idealism, one can already find a definition of concept that is radically antithetical to thought as identity and representation: "The image (*Bild*) seems to make the concept concrete, vital and agile; but just the opposite it's true. *In the image the life of the concept ceases*. And the concept should always mean life, that is, agility. *The fact that problems* and the work *immanent* to their discussion *remain open*. The problems, which the concept needs to formulate, can never be formulated and thought in it as concluded. This is the profound, eternal meaning, in which *Socrates* defined his concept as the question: what is it? (*τί ἐστι*). *Concept is a question and remains one,* nothing but a question. *The answer it incorporates must be a new question,* must provoke a new question. This is the intimate methodological relationship between question and answer: that every question must itself be an answer. Therefore, every answer can and must be a question.

What is realized in the system of concept is a new kind of reciprocal conditioning or action: *reciprocal action between question and answer*. No solution can be definitive. Concept is not *an absolute totality*."[48] Thus understood, concept is therefore a system. However, it is not dogmatic, fulfilled in itself, totalizing and totalitarian, but rather an endless and always open task. Instead of reducing the multiple to identity, it tries to understand the limitless differences of multiplicity in the light of the ideal of a never accomplished unity. From this perspective, the logical principle of the excluded middle – which Serres justifiably considers the main responsible for the violent and sacrificial nature of thought as identity – is not interpreted in the traditional way (that is, as a repetition of the principle of contradiction). Rather, this interpretation is rejected[49] in favour of a conception of the excluded middle as the very principle of inclusion of multiplicity in rational thinking, which is such as it aspires to a unitary form that it will never own. Since the formula is B or non-B, it only excludes the contradictory (B), and includes instead the non-contradictory multiple (non-B, that is, C or D or...) in the thought understood as an open and inchoative system insofar as it is understood as founding rather than foundation. Cohen writes: "Thus we can take this up as *the sense of the excluded middle*, we had predicted: that *skepticism* be excluded, according to which concept is only supposed to be a universal; according to which, wishing to ground the object in all its meanings in concept, and only acknowledge the ground of the object in this foundation is an illusion; according to which admitting the climax of the presuppositions of pure thought, the conclusion of pure knowledge, into concept is an illusion.

Since the law now excludes this middle, i.e. the illusion or rather skepticism of the illusion, it does include something else, i.e. the *system* in all its meanings. Just as it is true that concept is the system, it is true that system is concept. The system

[48] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1902, 1914[2]; this last edition was reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Georg Olms, Hildesheim-New York, Bd. 6, 1977, p. 378.

[49] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 393.

of concepts is the system of pure knowledge. And thus it becomes the *supreme* meaning of the system, which now emerges. *Concepts, pure presuppositions and pure knowledge constitute a system*. No system, like no concept, is fulfilled. New tasks arise from new solutions; but the new tasks must also grow within the previous solutions. This is a requirement of the system."[50]

In the light of Cohen's important arguments, our culture must certainly go further as it has acknowledged in a completely new and disruptive way the chaotic, fortuitous and indeterminable dimension of reality, through the developments of thermodynamics, electronics, cybernetics, and so on. Certainly, the determined and systematic form (the purpose of the rational understanding of reality) is no longer that visible, not even with the pure vision of reason. As Serres writes, one must look for new routes of reason between the islands of form, the formless and chaotic sea, and their interaction. But the aspiration to unity of the form, even in its absence, the *Sehnsucht* of the form, must nevertheless guide thought and historical action, because the alternative is precisely the scepsis of illusion and nonsense, which is a violent thought too.

I therefore agree with Cohen's idea that an "educated third" (which includes natural reality, the reality of human society and, above all, the relationships between them; or rather, which is capable of creating a history that is not based on the victimary sacrifice and its sacred concealment) can take place by referring to monotheistic religion, which has always been the bastion against the violence of the victimary sacrifice, its sacral concealment and man's power and domination over other men as the driving force of history (whereas Serres thought that an "educated third" could be formed through the resumption of Jupiter's mythological religion).[51] Only the one God's transcendence guarantees the teleological unity between nature and ethics and is the foundation of the irreducible multiplicity and equality of all men; only God's transcendent sovereignty delegitimizes any man's presumption of historical and political power over other men.

As we have seen, according to Serres, the Tower of Babel is an interesting example. Precisely because it remains unfinished – "without a top" (*découronnée*) – it is not a foundation because no victim is sacrificed on its unfinished terraces. On the contrary, the dispersion of languages from the tower of Babel creates the possibility of a non-excluding society receptive to invention and freedom. Well, this tower has remained as such, it has not been completed as a monument to the violent unity of languages and men, based on sacrifice and violence, because of the one God: he confused languages and scattered men, creating history as a space and time for the research and invention of a peaceful order among men that is based on partnership and ethical action messianically oriented toward justice and peace, rather than sacrifice and sacredness.

[50] *Ibid*., p. 395.

[51] Cf. M. SERRES, *Rome. Le livre des fondations*, cit., pp. 212ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 175ff.

Cadenza 4
Sacred vs. Holy
Some Food for Thought

I developed the following reflections about the sacred and the holy many years ago. However, since I haven't done sufficient research or analysis to transform them into a valid and well-argued theory, I never published them, despite the encouragement of some talented friends like the deceased Reiner Wiehl. Now Jack Bemporad, in the name of our friendship and my esteem for his committed thought and action, has once again exhorted me to publish those considerations as food for thought, albeit in the form of sketches. I have accepted his invitation, whilst being conscious of the fact that what I am proposing is at a very embryonic stage. I am therefore ready to take into consideration any comment or criticism that, as such, could only improve and enrich my reflections.

The Sacred

First of all, it is well-known that one may be unable to base one's opinion about the "sacred" on a definition. This does not happen for lack of definitional attempts, but, on the contrary, because numerous and different definitions have been proposed by the various perspectives of etymology, philology, history of religions, sociology, psychology, theology, philosophy, and then again within each one of these. Without even trying to choose one definition among this multiplicity of options, I propose here a meaning – rather than a definition – of the "sacred" as an operational concept to refer to in my considerations to follow.

One can understand as "sacred" a conception of nature and reality in general that believes that men are not the only subjects able to act and operate effectively within reality. According to the sacral conception and experience, there are other beings (personal or impersonal) able to influence or even determine the reality with which men interact. These being are in the world, albeit in spaces and places separate from

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those of the humans. They operate without a goal, or – which to us is the same – with a goal that is arbitrary or incomprehensible to humans. Or again, whenever the sacred is strongly anthropomorphized, they follow a goal according to dynamics also known by men, such as passions or interests. These beings are powerful and they are usually considered more powerful than men. Therefore, they can produce effects that prevail over the intentions of men (individuals and communities) and that may be auspicious or harmful to men themselves.

The sacred, therefore, concerns all those dimensions of reality in which these beings may intervene. It concerns the places, ways and forms in which these beings can manifest themselves or their effects to men, but also the places, ways and forms by which men can communicate with these beings, in order to intervene, cause, modify or neutralize – at times even by force – their will and actions.

Judeo-Christian Monotheism

Many past and present cultures are so strongly influenced or even determined by the "sacred" that several authors have recognized that every religion originates in the sacred. I believe that Judeo-Christian monotheism to be the largest and most enduring cultural tradition that refused the sacred and has engaged a multimillennial fight against it in the name of an alternative and opposite perspective. Here, regardless of any etymological, philological and historical consideration, I shall refer to this perspective as "the holy."

Other cultural traditions, such as ancient Greek philosophy, have intentionally distanced themselves from the concept of the sacred and I think that this was one of the factors that facilitated the synthesis between Judeo-Christian monotheism and Greek philosophy. However, I also believe that no other tradition has so radically committed itself to eliminating the sacred and replacing it with the holy.[1]

The first chapter (vv. 14, 15 and 16) of *Bereshit*, which is not the oldest but the first book of the Torah in the biblical canon, talks about the fourth day of creation. In it, the sun and the moon (which are universally deified in the cultures around Israel) are presented as "two lamps" that God created and placed in the sky so as to illuminate the earth day and night.

Several phenomena, which are important for the culture and existence of Israel are univocally oriented toward the confession of a faith that excludes and condemns any sacral conception of reality. Such phenomena are: the insistence on God's radical transcendence with respect to the world; the prohibition to depict him and compare him with any being living on earth, in the sky or under the ground; the strenuous fight against all forms of idolatry (Egyptian, Canaanite and then Babylonian); the elaboration and transformation of what sacrifice means and, lastly, the condemnation

[1] I will not speak about Islam, neither here nor in the following theories, not because I implicitly want to exclude it from the features of Judeo-Christian monotheism that I have just discussed, but because I simply do not have sufficient knowledge about Islam and, therefore, I cannot express any opinion about it. I hope that someone more expert will analyse the sacred in Islam and thus enrich my theses.

of magic. This inclination is actually reinforced in the Christian tradition (although for some people, in Judaism, the Christological conception of God made man is a return of the sacred).

Judeo-Christian monotheism has certainly produced a radical and continuous fight against the sacred. However, this obviously does not mean that it has definitively won and that the sacred has been eliminated from the culture affected by monotheism. In fact, even in this tradition, the sacred keeps appearing and manifesting itself as unmasked, perhaps defeated, but certainly not eliminated. One example is the difficult and controversial elaboration of the concept of "purity" that, albeit certainly oriented toward the desacralization (in many prophets' preaching and in Christianity), still remains an area where the sacred can resist and resurface. I will return to this concept later.

The Holy

The first and fundamental innovation brought by monotheism is the belief in the one God that absolutely transcends the world he created. This God, in his sovereign freedom, sometimes shows himself to men so that they can praise him, thank him, invoke him with their rites – but never force him to do anything. Men, individuals and communities, are given the entire creation so as to be responsible for it. With the term "holy" – which I intend once again as operational meaning, without trying to justify it, as should be done, from an etymological, philological, historical and scientific point of view – I mean this new perspective in which God transcends the world, and the latter is fully entrusted to man's responsible action. From the point of view of the "sacred," men are constantly worried about the possible effects of powers superior to him and immanent to the world. Men must therefore try, through rituals, to persuade such powers or force them to desist from these possible evil effects, and instead support and help men achieve their purposes. The "holy" is a radically different – or rather opposite – perspective. Due to their faith in an absolutely transcendent God, men are independent and completely free to act in the world. However, men are totally responsible for their actions and the consequent effects, since no political, economic, religious or natural power that does not come from God is recognized. For this reason, men measure themselves and their dignity from a sacral point of view on the basis of "purity" and "impurity," according to which they may or may not be able to ritually enter in an interested exchange with the divine. Instead, from the point of view of the "holy," men measure themselves on the basis of the categories of "good" and "evil:" "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good" (Micah 6, 89). On the other hand, "holiness," a quality that only God possesses, is an archetypal and ideal for man's moral action: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19, 2).[2]

[2] Rabbi Jack Bemporad brought to my attention the important passages of Jeremiah (chap. 7 and 26) in which the Temple and the nation itself are desacralized because people have committed injustice.

The powers of the sacred are immanent and because of this their actions in the world are inscrutably heterogeneous compared to men's criteria and values. On the one hand, this implicates man's impurity and continuous need for purification; on the other hand, it implicates man's attempt to ritually or magically obtain the benevolence of such powers by exchanging favours.

The holy God's transcendence is the foundation of the community of values, of good and evil, justice and mercy, between God and man and therefore of man's full autonomy to implement them by using his moral action.

Holy vs. Sacred

The sacred and the holy include entirely different, or rather, opposite categories.

The sacred is dominated by the categories of "pure" and the "impure"– or rather, by the category of "pure/impure." The pure and the impure, in fact, do not entirely abide by the principle of non-contradiction. Of course, the impure can be the opposite of the pure. However, purity and impurity coexist in some important dimensions of the sacral perspective such as the sacrificial mechanism and the consideration of female sexuality.

The holy, instead, is characterized by the categories of "good" and "evil," which are completely opposite.

Sacral impurity is a "stain" that can only be removed through a ritual purification. No action, either physical or moral, is able to remove this stain; only rituals can. We all know Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard*, which beautifully depicts this situation: "She noticed that the key was stained with blood, and so she wiped it two or three times, but the blood would not go away. Washing it was no use, and scrubbing it with sand and grease was no better; the blood was still there, for the key was enchanted and there was no way of cleaning it. When the blood was removed from one side it reappeared on the other."

However, "evil," as category of the holy, is the "guilt" that men, individuals and communities can and must overcome only with their moral action. This overcoming occurs through moral stages, entirely entrusted to man's responsibility and independent action: repentance, atonement and the conversion of the action to good. In terms of faith, which is different but not at all opposed to morality, God forgives evil and redeems it. Men thus recognise evil as "sin." The guilt towards men and the sin before God are two levels of understanding and experiencing evil (as related to morality and faith) that are not opposed but complementary. They both belong to the sphere of the holy and are radically different from sacral impurity.

Of course, also in Judeo-Christian monotheism the transition from the sacred to the holy only happened gradually and imperfectly. In the text of a prophetic book of the Bible, the *Book of Haggai*, it is thus possible to find an example of another important feature of sacral purity and impurity: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Ask now the priests the law, saying, 'if one bear holy [i.e. sacred] flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat,

shall it be holy [i.e. sacred]?' And the priests answered and said, 'No'. Then said Haggai, 'if one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean?' And the priests answered and said it shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai and said, 'so is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean'." (*Haggai* 2, 11–14).

Impurity as a "stain" is polluting, contagious, pandemic. Impurity contaminates purity, but not vice versa.

In the "holy" sphere, instead, a good deed is able to correct a bad one, and man, can always convert from evil to good by his sole moral decision.

Moreover, in the sphere of the sacred, ritual purification restores man to an undefiled state of innocence. From here, he may at any time fall again into a state of impurity, beyond his intentions and actions. In the sphere of the holy, instead, good and evil are moments of a moral event that is built according to a history marked by progress and regressions, but that can always improve, starting from any of its points.

This is also related to the different conception of time that, here, I can only touch upon.

The theory of the cyclical conception of time in mythical and sacral cultures has been so variously supported and spread that it almost became a commonplace. On the one hand, this theory is certainly true, as the cyclical model of nature is a fundamental reference for these cultures. However, I think it necessary to emphasize a fundamental feature of the cyclical conception of time in sacral cultures: that is, time is conceived as a broken circle – it must be interrupted in order to experience the sacred. If time always repeated itself circularly, without interruption, there would be no way or possibility to break free from the stain of impurity accumulated in the past. The very interruption between the end of the past time and the beginning of the new time opens a window beyond time and a discontinuity between the two eras. It is no coincidence that, in this *epoché* between two times, most sacral cultures established festivities and rites of purification, in which the discontinuity that allows for the new beginning is repeatedly underlined by the disappearance and reappearance of light, the suspension of normal social rules, sacral euphoria, etc.

The cyclical time of sacral cultures is generally opposed by the linear time of Judeo-Christian monotheism. This model is certainly confirmed by the teleological conception of history of the messianic prophetism and Christian eschatology. However, referring to the Wisdom Books of the Bible, such as *Qohelet*, other models of time and history of monotheism could also be theorized. Unfortunately, I cannot dwell further on these considerations, as they are too broad and challenging.[3]

[3] On *Qohelet*, cf. Theme III, Cadenza 1.

Notes on the Present Situation

The present culture is certainly and radically desacralized. The long struggle of Judeo-Christian monotheism – as well as other factors that may or may not be connected to it, such as capitalism – has progressively weakened sacral myths and rites up to completely depriving them of their effectiveness. Anyhow, the sacred survives in the depth of the human mind-set, of both individuals and communities. A serious issue arises: with the disappearance of sacral myths and rites, men no longer have the appropriate means to manage this sense of the sacred. Of course, monotheism and its institutions cannot be entrusted to deal with it, since its fundamental characteristic is to fight to eliminate the sacred and, if the latter survives, to keep trying to transform it. On the other hand, any different attempt to build new myths and new rites is doomed to fail. The "technicized myth" that Károly Kerényi described so well[4] has no effect on the sacred. Therefore, contemporary man must wildly experience the sacred, which he cannot shape through its cultural elaboration.

Furthermore, there is and continues to be a very serious misunderstanding about the relationship between the sacred and the holy (and with the present text I hope to help eliminate it). Influential figures of monotheism often appreciate and rejoice for the so-called "return of the sacred." I think that this happens because the sacred is believed to be the basis of all religions. As known, such a belief widely circulated in Christian theology as well.[5] However, one is tempted to think that, if the sacred were the origin and basis of every religion (as many have claimed), then it would be better to consider Judeo-Christian monotheism as other than religion.

This misunderstanding leads to unclear and sometimes highly inaccurate ideological positions. I will conclude this brief reflection with an example that I think is currently relevant. The bioethical debate on the problems concerning the beginning and end of life is dominated, at least in Italy, by two highly ideological positions that oppose each other without leaving any space for a more reasonable and articulated debate. Its opponents, but often also its supporters, refer to the former as the defence of the "sacredness of life." If, according to those who use it, this expression refers to the non-negotiability of human life, then this thesis is certainly respectable and can be proposed in an ethical debate. However, in this case, I do not see why one should resort to the term "sacred" when much more appropriate and unequivocal concepts, such as the legal concept of "inalienability," are available. The problem is that the principle of the "sacredness of life" is often connected to – and sometimes confused with – the principle of the "sacredness of nature" that, on the contrary, can absolutely not be recognized as a principle of the monotheistic tradition. On the other hand, those against this idea see themselves as the defenders of the "quality of life." Upon closer examination, though, they are often rather the defenders of the

[4] Cf. K. KERÉNYI, *Dal mito genuino al mito tecnicizzato*, in *Atti del Colloquio Internazionale si "Tecnica e casistica*," Istituto di Studi Filosofici, Roma 1964.

[5] There is no need to recall the influence of theological works such as Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* (1917).

"sacredness of technology" and are completely subjugated by the dynamics of capitalism. One is thus faced with an equivocal and paradoxical situation. On the one hand, some representatives of Judeo-Christian monotheism, bearers of a radically desacralizing message, present themselves as the defenders of "sacredness." On the other hand, some representatives of laicism and scientific atheism, just like their nineteenth-century predecessors and essentially with the same arguments, in the seeming presence of a fight against all sacredness and superstition, support a "sacred" conception of technology as superhuman power that cannot be regulated by man, but only obeyed and served until its unfathomable outcomes are accomplished.

Cadenza 5
The Sacrality of the Second Nature
or
Triumphant Capitalism

Man was in anguish, peering from the entrance of the cave at the night sky. It was magically lit by the full moon at first, but was growing darker by the minute, invaded by threatening and fatal shadows. The dark mass was advancing on the disk of the moon and stole the glory of its icy light, casting on Earth the darkness of an ominous and terrifying night.

No known rite had been effective. No threat, otherwise feared by enemies and by foreigners, no aggressive scream, no violent stomps on the ground with both feet, and no teeth gnashing or club shaking had had any effect on the anonymous, blind, indifferent power of fate that expanded with its shadow up to hiding the moon and annihilating the Earth, man and everything he lived on.

*****

Many cells that called themselves "I," frightened and anguished, followed the fast, blustering fall of huge rock masses of financial capital, which nonchalantly crushed the anthill of societies, groups, communities, singles and doubles, overwhelming them in a magmatic current flowing turbulently in no particular direction.

There were no political, financial, economic rites or sacral tricks – known to most people or just a few – that could somehow prevent or tame the fatal event in which no "I" participated (*partem capiens*).

*****

Nature is a human experience that is rooted in the sacred immemorial. Men have always felt – over, under, and around them – a huge, indefinite living being: an anonymous Leviathan who spent its vitality without beginning and without end, impassive in his whole to every irrelevant start and every irrelevant end; a body without organs, crossed by myriads of trajectories, all and each one superficial as to their mass, which is also devoid of depth. Much more and much worse than that:

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men have always felt that they themselves were non-participating parts, insignificant trajectories crossing this whole, whose desperate and foolish stubbornness to fix itself in an identity, to say and to be "I," was negligible and neglected, ignored and even unknown to Nature.

That is why men have tried to come to terms, to create transactions, a negotiation, with this fatal Nature. Such a negotiation could not help starting, and has always started, with the offer, the sacrifice, the sacred prostitution of oneself – that is, of one's own "I" narrowed or widened (children, slaves, cattle, goods), or through nominees (foreign sacrificial victims). There was no other conceivable way to attract the attention of Nature if not by attempting an interlocution saying "I", shouting "I," albeit in the act of self-annihilation, so that the whole would become a "You" and be no longer threatening but open to negotiation. It was illusion. Nature did not notice any "I," none of its cells, because Nature is not "I," it has no identity, name, origin or purpose; it isn't good or bad; it has no relations or organs for relations, because it has no inside or outside, no surface or depth: it simply lives and, in its living, it incessantly and blindly changes, and in its changing it creates and destroys its parts, its cells – millions, billions of them – in catastrophic events, namely in endless successions of balance and breaks, flows and interruption of flows, immutable and impassive through it all.

*****

From the equally immemorial depths whence the experiences narrated in the ancient books of the Bible arose, we know the story of those ancient fathers, perhaps Hurrians, who have experienced the simple and radical negation of the sacred. They revolutionised their experience, they refused to offer any sacrifice to sacred Nature and called God not the latter, but he who rejected sacrifice. They denied the anonymous indifference of sacred Nature any word and turned their invocation, their scream (YAH) to Other. Talking to him with the language of equal dignity, they spoke without knowing who was replying; they spoke with him about every thing in the world, giving each a name and thus freeing it from the sacral anonymousness of Nature. They originated an ancestry that multiplied and widened to include whomever wanted to emancipate from the sacred Nature. Nothing is sacred, nothing is profane for them, but every thing is good or has to be so, called by its own name to itself.

*****

In modern times, which we call ours only due to laziness, we wearily repeat certain clichés and empty stereotypes, which in reality are now gone; legions of religious priests and secular priests have talked to us of Nature ad nauseam. The former preaching sacred nature, the latter scorning it, both factions offered their servile homage to it (because advocacy and outrage are equally part of the rite of those who are anxious to flirt with the sacred).

Philosophers and *maîtres à penser* have generally told us that Nature is dead. Some say that man has lost his relation to what involves him while transcending

him, turning into a Promethean master of himself and all things, dominating and no longer dominate, animating and no longer animate. Others say that man has emancipated himself from the slavery of fear and anxiety before sacred Nature and is now fully free and responsible for himself and his life. For both views, the weapon that killed the sacred Leviathan is *Techne*, which after all means nothing unless one dares reveal the power producing and using it. Some fools mistake it for reason, just like the ignoramus mistakes sparkling rubbish for fine gold; but if we want to call it by its real name, then this power is called Technology and it is no subject but, like Nature, a sacred Whole.

The age of metaphysics, of the loss of Being – some say – is the age of *Techne*. The age of secularization and human emancipation is the age of *Techne* – say others. And they sing this antiphon, this struggle of opposing words, on the same chord.

Both are devotees of the new sacred great beast that – whilst being just as fatal, anonymous and indifferent – has replaced Nature. This second sacred Nature is called Capital, and Capitalism is the way of being in which it completely identifies and indifferently exists, filling up Western being just like the first Nature. A new body without organs, superficially run through by the myriad of trajectories that, as always, madly insist on referring to themselves as "I," even though this word never looses the evanescence of a *flatus vocis* to become real discourse.

The Capital – enormous shapeless and protean beast triumphs, framed by the useful idiots who sing hymns to the progressive wonders of *Techne* like the eunuchs, prostitutes and dwarves of a demented court for a monarch who does not reign nor notices those who want be his subjects, but quietly exists in a dynamic standing still in place at increasingly higher speeds. The Capital lives feeding on events and cells it does not need to catch, because they are nowhere else but on him, and are none other than its manners and streaks. The beast devours itself, it would seem if it made sense, but it doesn't, because it is not a subject nor does it say "I:" it is a new sacred nature.

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These days, between July and August 2011, in the West we are looking in terror and distress at huge financial collapses, violent and victorious attacks to the debt system of the most powerful sovereign states, and the gradual erosion of their inane defences – all of this amid a deafening and inconclusive succession the statements by those who are recognized as experts and defenders of such helpless citadels.

Many recognize in these events the real threat to their jobs, the storm that will probably topple the foundations of their business, the shadow of darkness stretching on their precarious present and their impossible future, the axe befalling on those social security garrisons that should reassure their old age. Understandably, they are afraid. But this is the outlook of small, irrelevant, tingling subjective trajectories, which end up immobilized in bewilderment on the body without organs of the Capital. They will soon be swept away, with laws and regulations of the various States, so as to not clutter the field hindering the dynamics of the most vital flows, which in this situation reinforce more than ever the triumphant pulsing of Capitalism.

The same financial powers that only a few years ago were rescued from the abyss with a huge outpouring of capital by the States, now use those very capitals to attack the States that saved them, recovering vigour in their tireless and blind aimless flow. In the overall perspective of the capital, the situation is very positive. The flows are increasing, waste is eliminated, the great beast is vital more than ever and expands devouring itself, which does not lead at all to self-destruction, but to limitless self-affirmation.

In many places there is talk of the crisis of capitalism, of the system's failure. Unfortunately, the opposite is true. For several decades now Capitalism has reached its completion and is now celebrating its triumph. New Nature without a subject, the Capital envelops and surpasses every particular destiny and lives its dynamic solipsistic existence, neither good nor bad, in which and for which individuals who still call themselves "I" are raised or destroyed without any reason and without any goal. The means that the Capital has at its disposal for this triumphant persistence are Techniques: precisely those Techniques that the pathetic secularists – liberal and enlightened – keep on praising before an exhausted people. New financial and banking Techniques, new Techniques of communication and transaction, computer Techniques, statistical Techniques, Techniques of calculation and prediction: all this has greatly enhanced the dynamism of aimless flows and therefore the vitality of the Capital.

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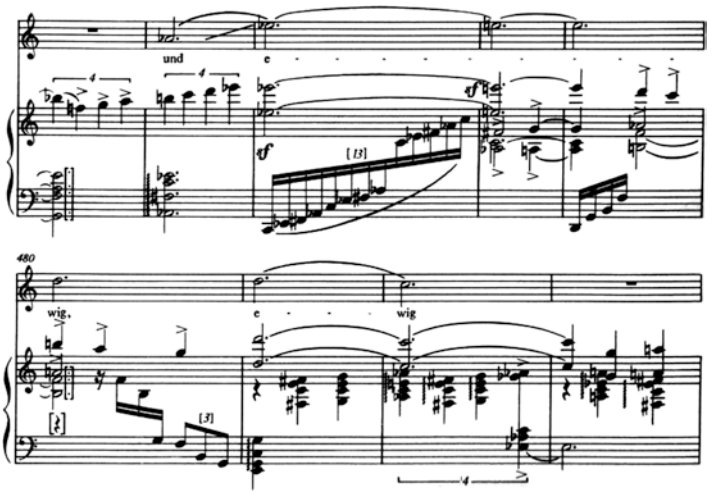
Faced with this new nature, most people – and among them, in the front row, the strong spirits, fighting tirelessly the sacredness of the first Nature – ceaselessly surrender and offer sacrifices: they give up their goods, they also expose the possibilities of life and work of their children, and throw everything into the sacrificial fire, in the sacral attempt to appease the Leviathan. No one questions the triumphant Capital: it is sacred. People rather try to placate it or save themselves by keeping close to its court.

I do not know if there will be a chance to escape, to get rid of this new fatality and sacral subservience to it. Maybe we have to hope for something similar to what has already happened and maybe we have to look in that same direction to spy on the arrival of a chance of liberation. Maybe one of these days some nomadic Hurrian will proudly turn his back on the fierce Baal, denying him any propitiatory sacrifice, and with a courageous gesture of emancipation and genuine freedom will turn to talk to an Other, without knowing his name, but addressing him as an equal and receiving as an answer his confirmation in his fight against the sacredness of the Capital and its *Techne*.

6th August 2011

A Cadenza Instead of a Conclusion
Let Us Make Man

Indeed for us fleeting beings the word of the Sehnsucht is eternal,
the last word of our Song of the Earth.
Our heart knows no other wish but this.
(Franz Rosenzweig)[1]



(Gustav Mahler)[2]

Starting from the definition of the concept or the concepts implied in a theme would be a well-ordered way to propose a reflection on it – however, this is not always possible. It is particularly impossible for the idea of "humanism" which I

[1] F. ROSENZWEIG, *Der "Ewige*," in M. BUBER-F.ROSENZWEIG, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, Schocken Verlag, Berlin 1936, p. 208.

[2] G. MAHLER, *Das Lied von der Erde* (Version for Voice and Piano).

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intend to tackle here. There is no such thing as a broadly shared definition of "humanism." Yet there is no doubt that the issue has been repeatedly proposed in the history of ideas of Western culture, to affirm the humanist nature of this culture, to deny it, or even to affirm its anti-humanistic character. The question of the definition, in this case, it is even more unusual: in fact it can be said that every time that humanism was themed, the question of its proposal or its denial has been identified with that of its definition.

It is certainly true that the appearance of the term in philosophy is relatively recent. As is known, it was used for the first time (Humanismus) in 1808, by Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer in his book: *Der Streit des Philanthropinismus und Humanismus in der Theorie des Erziehungs-Unterrichts unserer Zeit.*[3] But the term "humanist" has undoubtedly appeared long before in Western culture. In the Renaissance, it denoted not only the lover of *humanae litterae*, but also the learned supporter of a conception that re-evaluates man's human virtues and his cosmic, historical and political dignity.

The meaning and use of the term "*humanitas*" is even more ancient: it indicates a cultural conception as well as a philosophical and political ideal. Since the second century BC, in the Scipionic Circle, the idea of *humanitas* has moved and reinterpreted in Roman culture the great Greek ideals of *philantropia* and *paideia*. From the Scipionic Circle the culture of *humanitas* then went through Cicero and the great poetic and rhetorical classic thought, thus surviving in the Middle Ages and finding new vitality in the Italian society of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. And yet as early as in the fifteenth century Coluccio Salutati wrote that this word "includes in itself more than is commonly believed."[4]

The meaning of the term "humanism" was always deeply influenced, indeed entirely determined by the intellectual and practical intention of those who used it, to the point, I repeat, that the various thoughts for or against humanism were resolved largely in formulation of a definition, which included and justified the promotion or condemnation.

Niethammer himself, in the abovementioned book, set "*Humanismus*" against "*Animalismus*,"[5] thus giving the term a manifest and strong ideological value. The same goes for the ancient use of the term "*humanitas*" and the fourteenth century use of the term "humanism." Furthermore, the flag of humanism has always been waved in very different and even contrasting struggles. The idea has been used in an

[3] F. I. NIETHAMMER, *Der Streit des Philanthropinismus und Humanismus in der Theorie des Erziehungs-Unterrichts unserer Zeit*, F. Frommann, Jena 1808.

[4] "plus igitur humanitatis importatur verbo quam communiter cogitetur:" *Lettera a Carlo Malatesta Signore di Rimini*, in *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, a cura di F. Novati, vol. III, Istituto Storico Italiano, Roma 1896, p. 536.

[5] F. I. NIETHAMMER, *Der Streit des Philanthropinismus und Humanismus in der Theorie des Erziehungs-Unterrichts unserer Zeit*, cit., p. 19.

anti-theistic sense, but there has also been a religious humanism; humanism has sometimes been naturalist and sometime anti-naturalist; it has also been declined in multiple and different political meanings.

In any case this term is rich in ideal meanings, which have always made it the subject of intense and sometimes heated debate. Certainly, from the very outset, those who proclaimed the value of *humanitas* were not simply stating a fact of nature, but claiming an ideal. Consider Terence's well-known verse: "*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*:" one cannot take it as a speciesist declaration, placing the distinction between the identical and the alien in belonging to a particular natural species; obviously, it is rather the claim of universal solidarity as a choice of life and value.

To contextualize the reflections that I intend to unfold on the possibility of a humanistic proposal for the postmodern culture, it seems appropriate to start by retracing some stages of the debate on humanism that, in my opinion, have been relevant and cannot be neglected.

Ontological Humanism

In 1945–1946 two important philosophers, Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, expressed their views on the topic: the first held a conference on 29 October 1945 about *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, which was published in 1946 under the same title; in 1946 the second replied to a letter by Jean Beaufret with a letter (published in 1947 and again, with a few changes, in 1949) titles *Brief über den Humanismus*.

The two writings are very different from each other for both their thesis and the development of their discourse, as well as their general meaning: in fact, the first (as emerges from the title) is a convinced affirmation of humanism, while the second is a criticism and a rejection of it. However the basis of the two different arguments is a common argument: the criticism and negation of ontological humanism, that is, of the conception that places man in a privileged position in terms of being and thought on the basis of a "nature" or "essence" that defines him a priori in its ontological peculiarity as opposed to all other entities. Sartre states that "there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence – a being whose existence comes before its essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept of it."[6] Heidegger takes up and reaffirms the thesis he already formulated in *Sein und Zeit*[7]:

[6] J.-P. SARTRE, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Les Éditions Nagel, Paris 1946, p. 21 *passim*; Eng. trans. C. Macomber, Yale University Press, New Haven & London 2007, p. 22 *passim*.

[7] Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, in IDEM, *Gesamtausgabe*, I. Abteilung: *Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914–1970*, Bd. 2., Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 1977, p. 56; Eng. trans. by J. Stambaugh, State University of New York Press, Albany 1998, p. 40.

"The 'essence' of Dasein lies in his existence."[8] The two similar statements, have a very different meaning in the context of these arguments; however, both constitute a radical negation of any a priori ontological conception and definition of man.

For Sartre, abandoning the reference to the unchanging essence of man means denying a false humanism that makes man similar to any object produced through techne according to a predetermined essence. Therefore, it means inaugurating in a more authentic humanism, for which man is the architect of himself, not to realize an a priori essence, but in the full and absolute freedom and responsibility for his choices: "What do we mean here by 'existence precedes essence?' We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself. If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. (...) man is nothing other than what he makes of himself (...) man first exists; that is (...) man is, before all else, something that projects itself into a future, and is conscious of doing so. Man is indeed a project that has a subjective existence (...). If, however, existence truly does precede essence, man is responsible for what he is."[9] Further down he writes: "man is (...) condemned at all times to invent man."[10] Therefore Sartre affirms humanism as the essential meaning of existentialism. But he distinguishes authentic humanism from inauthentic and harmful humanism, still tied to an absolute and ontologically closed concept: "existentialism will never consider man as an end, because man is constantly in the making. And we have no right to believe that humanity is something we could worship, in the manner of Auguste Comte. The cult of humanity leads ultimately to an insular Comteian humanism and – this needs to be said – to Fascism. We do *not* want that type of humanism.

But there is another meaning to the word 'humanism.' It is basically this: man is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized; and, on the other hand, it is in pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist. Since man is this transcendence, and grasps objects only in relation to such transcendence, he is himself the core and focus of this transcendence. The only universe that exists is the human one – the universe of human subjectivity. This link between transcendence as constitutive of man (not in the sense that God is transcendent, but in the sense that man passes beyond himself) and subjectivity (in the sense that man is not an island unto himself but always present in a human universe) is what we call 'existentialist humanism.' This is humanism because we remind man that there is no legislator other than himself and that he must, in his abandoned state, make his own choices, and also because we show that it is not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside of himself in the form of

[8] M. HEIDEGGER, *Brief über den Humanismus*, in IDEM, *Gesamtausgabe. I. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914–1970*, Band 9: *Wegmarken*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 1976, p. 325; Eng. trans. in M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, ed. by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 248.

[9] J.-P. SARTRE, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, cit., pp. 21–24; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 22f.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 38; Eng. trans. cit., p. 29.

liberation, or of some special achievement, that man will realize himself as truly human."[11]

Heidegger's thesis: "the 'essence' of Dasein lies in his existence" has a completely different meaning, context and implication compared to Sartre's thesis, despite sharing with it the rejection of an ontological – or, to use Heidegger's terminology, "metaphysical" – humanism. So much so that Sartre regards Heidegger as an existentialist, precisely for his assumption that existence comes before essence.[12] Heidegger rejects this claim of existentialism and accuses Sartre of failing to break free from the metaphysical conception of man.[13]

According to Heidegger, "every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one."[14] Ever since the "*παιδεία*" of late Greek antiquity (which for Heidegger means classic Greek thought), and then in the Roman "*humanitas*" – then recovered in the Italian Renaissance – the fundamental concept has been the metaphysical relationship between "*essential*" and "*existential*," understood as a potentiality and reality of the entity. This very objectification of Being in the entity is the oblivious fate of Western metaphysics: whether this relationship is considered in one direction or another, it remains the sign and the character of metaphysical thought. Thus Sartre's humanism, with its reversal of the relationship between man's essence and existence, does not come out of metaphysics: "Sartre expresses the basic tenet of existentialism in this way: Existence precedes essence. In this statement he is taking *existentia* and *essentia* according to the metaphysical meaning, which from Plato's time on has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre reverses this statement. But the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement."[15]

For Heidegger, the main difference of his thesis is precisely the reference to another and more originary meaning of "existence" compared to the metaphysical one. This is why he also expresses it differently from a lexical standpoint, by means of the word "ek-sistence." Heidegger writes: "What the human being is – or, as it is called in the traditional language of metaphysics, the 'essence' of the human being – lies in his ek-sistence. But ek-sistence thought in this way is not identical with the traditional concept of *existentia*, which means actuality in contrast to the meaning of *essentia* as possibility. In *Being and Time* (...) this sentence is italicized: 'The 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence.' However, the opposition between *existentia* and *essentia* is not what is at issue here, because neither of these metaphysical determinations of being, let alone their relationship, is yet in question. Still less does the sentence contain a universal statement about *Dasein*, in the sense in which this word came into fashion in the eighteenth century, as a name for 'object,' intending to express the metaphysical concept of the actuality of the actual. On the contrary,

[11] *Ibid*., pp. 92–94; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 52f.

[12] Cf. *ibid*., p. 17; Eng. trans. cit., p. 20.

[13] Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Brief über den Humanismus*, cit., pp. 328f., 334; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 250f., 254f.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 321; Eng. trans. cit., p. 245.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 328; Eng. trans. cit., p. 250.

the sentence says: the human being occurs essentially in such a way that he is the 'there' (*das 'Da'*), that is, the clearing of being. The 'being' of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, that is, of an ecstatic inherence in the truth of being. The ecstatic essence of the human being consists in ek-sistence, which is different from the metaphysically conceived *existential*."[16]

Thus, for Heidegger, thinking man beyond the metaphysical reduction to the entity means acknowledging that "the essence of ek-sistence is destined existentially-ecstatically from the essence of the truth of being."[17] In other words, as he explains a little later, it means recognizing that "the point is that in the determination of the humanity, of the human being as ek-sistence what is essential is not the human being but being – as the dimension of the ecstasis of ek-sistence."[18] Therefore, against Sartre's thesis "*Précisément nous sommes sur un plan où il y a seulement des hommes*"[19] he sets a different thesis: "*Précisément nous sommes sur un plan où il y a principalement l'Être*."[20] Thus, in conclusion, for Heidegger it is still true that "What the human being is (…) lies in his ek-sistence,"[21] but this statement means: "The 'being' of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, that is, of an ecstatic inherence in the truth of being."[22]

As mentioned above, Sartre's criticism of ontological humanism is functional to the proposal of a new, more authentic, ethical humanism. The situation is different in Heidegger. There is no doubt that Heidegger, too, criticizes ontological humanism. In *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, published in 1947 together with *Brief über den Humanismus*, Heidegger directly relates the Greek *παιδεία* to the reduction of Being to the entity typical of metaphysics, which took place with Plato's theory of ideas: "This same interpretation of being as *ἰδέα*, which owes its primacy to a change in the essence of *ἀλήθεια*, requires that viewing the ideas be accorded high distinction. Corresponding to this distinction is *παιδεία*, the 'education' of human beings. Concern with human being and with the position of humans amidst beings entirely dominates metaphysics.

The beginning of metaphysics in the thought of Plato is at the same time the beginning of 'humanism'."[23]

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[16] *Ibid*., p. 325; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 247f.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 333; Eng. trans. cit., p. 253.

[18] *Ibid*., pp. 333f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 254.

[19] J.-P. SARTRE, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, cit., p. 36; Eng. trans. cit., p. 28, cit. in M. HEIDEGGER, *Brief über den Humanismus*, cit., p. 334; Eng. trans. cit., p. 254.

[20] *Ibidem*.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 329; Eng. trans. cit., p. 247.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 330; Eng. trans. cit., p. 248.

[23] M. HEIDEGGER, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, in IDEM, *Gesamtausgabe. I. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914–1970*, Band 9: *Wegmarken*, cit., p. 236; Eng. trans. in M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, ed. by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 181.; cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Brief über den Humanismus*, cit., pp. 321, 345; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 245, 262.

Heidegger refers to one of the questions asked by Beaufret in his letter: "*Comment redonner un sens au mot 'Humanisme'?*"[24] Heidegger's reply seems to also go in the direction of a new humanism, just like Sartre, and yet it does so with a different meaning: "Your question not only presupposes a desire to retain the word 'humanism' but also contains an admission that this word has lost its meaning.

It has lost it through the insight that the essence of humanism is metaphysical, which now means that metaphysics not only does not pose the question concerning the truth of being but also obstructs the question, insofar the metaphysics persists in the oblivion of being. But the same thinking that has led us this insight into the questionable essence of humanism has likewise compelled us to think the essence of the human being more primordially. With regard to this more essential *humanitas* of *homo humanus* there arises the possibility of restoring to the word 'humanism' a historical sense that is older than the oldest meaning chronologically reckoned."[25] However, the discourse immediately turns to the claim of the inopportunity of keeping the word "humanism," and this inopportunity, I think, is actually the choice of a non-humanistic thought. In fact, a little later Heidegger clarifies: "'Humanism' now means, in case we decide to retain the word, that the essence of the human being is essential for the truth of being, specifically in such a way that what matters is not the human being simply as such. So we are thinking a curious kind of 'humanism.' The word results in a name that is a *lucus a non lucendo* [literally, a grove where no light penetrates]."[26]

Abandoning the defence of "humanism" of course does not mean supporting a thought that "aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of the human being."[27] However, Heidegger posits that thought, "by means of open resistance to 'humanism',"[28] can unleash a reflection on the true being of man as "ecstatic inherence in the truth of being."[29]

This Heideggerian perspective is no humanism. He says he wants to attribute to man a higher level than what he attributes to humanism, but this level dispels man as a subject and takes away from him any choice or decision, leaving only the task – which it is not a responsibility but a "question" – to correspond to a fate that is not his, but that of being: he is insofar as he is "the shepherd of being:" "The human being is (...) 'thrown' by being itself into the truth of being, so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might guard the truth of being, in order that beings might appear in the light of being as the beings they are. Human beings do not decide whether and how beings appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the clearing of being, come to presence and depart. The advent of beings lies in the destiny of being. But for humans it is ever a question of finding what is

[24] *Ibid*., pp. 315, 344; Eng. trans. cit., p. 241, 262.

[25] *Ibid*., pp. 344f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 262.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 345; Eng. trans. cit., p. 263.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 330; Eng. trans. cit., p. 251; cf. *ibid*., p. 346; Eng. trans. cit., p. 263.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 346; Eng. trans. cit., p. 263.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 330; Eng. trans. cit., p. 251.

fitting in their essence that corresponds to such destiny; for in accord to this destiny the human being as ek-sisting has to guard the truth of being. The human being is the shepherd of being."[30]

It seems clear to me that Heidegger's proposal is no new humanism, but a new "fundamental ontology,"[31] in which man is involved beyond his own will and his own responsibility. With that we come to a point that I think is of central importance: the ethical dimension of humanism. Through ethics, Sartre criticizes ontological humanism and replaces it with the new existential humanism. Heidegger, instead, rejects the ontological humanism of metaphysics in the name of a new non-humanistic ontology: what is the role of ethics in this?

Let us start with Sartre. The conference *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* is Sartre's response to two forms of criticism: on the one hand, the Marxists accusing existentialism of "encouraging people to remain in a state of quietism and despair;"[32] on the other hand, the Catholics accusing it of "denying the reality and validity of human enterprise, for inasmuch as we choose to ignore God's commandments and all values thought to be eternal, all that remains is the strictly gratuitous; everyone can do whatever he pleases."[33] Against these objections Sartre sets a conception of existentialism that – starting from the principle that "man is nothing other than what he makes of himself"[34] – mainly conceives of man as "a project that has a subjective existence,"[35] which therefore "is responsible for what he is."[36] This does not mean a rule for the private life of the individual, but the responsibility of each for the construction of a universally valid ethic and, in it, the formation of man: "in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men (...). Choosing to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose (...). If (...) existence precedes essence and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for our whole era. Our responsibility is thus much greater than we might have supposed, because it concerns all mankind."[37] Sartre decidedly affirms: "I am therefore responsible for myself and for everyone else, and I am fashioning a certain image of man as I choose him to be. In choosing myself, I choose man."[38] The radical freedom of the individual is, for Sartre, ethical responsibility for all. Against a so-called radical secular morality (which, suppressed God, still retains all the previous values, motivated by a narrow perspective of opportunities and social etiquette);[39] against a superficial morality of the sentiment (which entrusts each choice to

[30] *Ibid*., pp. 330f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 252.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 357; Eng. trans. cit., p. 271.

[32] J.-P. SARTRE, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, cit., p. 9; Eng. trans. cit., p. 17.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 11; Eng. trans. cit., p. 18.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 22; Eng. trans. cit., p. 22.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 23; Eng. trans. cit., p. 23.

[36] *Ibid*., p. 24; Eng. trans. cit., p. 23.

[37] *Ibid*., pp. 25f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 24.

[38] *Ibid*., p. 27; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 24f.

[39] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 34f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 27f.

immediate motives, not subject to the criticism of their value); [40] against the heroic morality of Gide's gratuitous act,[41] Sartre proposes a morality of engagement (*engagement*). This morality, opposed to quietism, is one in which the subject is aware that, through their own choice and free action, they collaborate to the realization of history and universal values. Just as there is no a priori human nature, so there are no a priori values. Yet man – who acts within the existential, historical and cultural limits that make up the "human condition (*condition humaine*)"[42] – every time, through his free action, chooses his own and the other people's destiny, in an on-going relationship of "intersubjectivity (*inter-subjectivité*)."[43] The ethical choice of man constructs man and history: "What we mean to say is that a man is nothing but a series of enterprises, and that he is the sum, organization, and aggregate of the relations that constitute such enterprises."[44]

For this ethical humanism proposed by Sartre, man, through the freedom and responsibility of his own choice and his own actions, does not tend to realize an alleged a priori essence or nature, but transcends himself realizing himself in history: "man is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized; and, on the other hand, it is in pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist. Since man is this transcendence, and grasps objects only in relation to such transcendence, he is himself the core and focus of this transcendence."[45]

The theme of ethics also appears in Heidegger's *Brief über den Humanismus* by means of a passage of Beaufret's letter quoted in the text: "Ce que je cherche à faire, depuis longtemps déjà, c'est precise le rapport de l'ontologie avec une éthique possible" [What I have been trying to do for a long time now is to determine precisely the relation of ontology to a possible ethics].[46] At first, Heidegger seems to take this need expressed by Beaufret very seriously: "Where the essence of the human being is thought so essentially, i.e., solely from the question concerning the truth of being, and yet without elevating the human being to the center of beings, a longing necessarily awakens for a peremptory directive and for rules that say how the human being, experienced from ek-sistence toward being, ought to live in a fitting manner."[47] However, in the following pages, Heidegger brings ethics – as well as logic and physics – back to the categories of metaphysics inaugurated by Plato, that is, the thought that reduces the Being to beings and thus becomes unable to think the truth of Being in himself. But in an attempt to bring the ethical problem within the proper perspective of thought that thinks the Being and of man as ek-sistent, which is ecstatically in the truth of Being, Heidegger de facto empties this problem by

[40] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 37f., 43ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 29, 32.

[41] Cf. *ibid*., p. 74; Eng. trans. cit., p. 45.

[42] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 67ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 41f.

[43] Cf. *ibid*., p. 67; Eng. trans. cit., p. 42.

[44] *Ibid*., p. 58; Eng. trans. cit., p. 38.

[45] *Ibid*., pp. 92f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 52.

[46] M. HEIDEGGER, *Brief über den Humanismus*, cit., p. 353; Eng. trans. cit., p. 268.

[47] *Ibidem*.

shifting the discourse on the presence of nothingness in being itself. Man's ethical choice between good and evil is reduced to illusion in favour of an ontological thought, in a clear and explicit Schellinghian and Hegelian way,[48], so that the negative is an inner stage of Being: "The nihilating in being is the essence of what I call the nothing. Hence, because it thinks being, thinking thinks the nothing.

To healing being first grants ascent into grace; to raging his compulsion to malignancy."[49]

Therefore man is recognized no ethical responsibility, but only the ecstatic attitude of protecting Being, of bringing Being – on which he depends and in his which he dwells – "to language."[50] "But now in what relation does the thinking of being stand to theoretical and practical comportment? It exceeds all contemplation because it cares for the light in which a seeing, as *theoria*, can first live and move. Thinking attends to the clearing of being in that it puts its saying of being into language as the home of eksistence. Thus thinking is a deed. But a deed that also surpasses all *praxis*. Thinking permeates action and production, not through the grandeur of its achievement and not as a consequence of its effect, but through the humbleness of its inconsequential accomplishment.

For thinking in its saying merely brings the unspoken word of being to language."[51]

Therefore an essential component of Heidegger's anti-humanist conception is the emptying out of the ethical issue. Man, insofar as he ek-sists, is not measured against the responsibility of choice and action in the world and in history, indeed it escapes to it, in the name of fidelity to Being. When Heidegger reformulates the authentic ethical question, the answer he gives is clear in this sense: "For it must be asked: If the thinking that ponders the truth of being defines the essence of *humanitas* as ek-sistence from the latter's belongingness to being, then does thinking remain only a theoretical representation of being and of the human being; or can we obtain from such knowledge directives that can be readily applied to our active lives?

The answer is that such thinking is neither theoretical nor practical. It comes to pass [*ereignet sich*] before this distinction. Such thinking is, insofar as it is, recollection of being and nothing else. Belonging to being, because thrown by being into the preservation of its truth and claimed for such preservation, it thinks being. Such thinking has no result. It has no effect. It satisfies its essence in that it is. But it is by saying its matter."[52]

I have considered and partly summarily exposed these two short texts by Sartre and Heidegger, not because it was in itself necessary or useful in itself, given their notoriety, but to compare two writings that start both from the rejection of ontological humanism to reach very different outcomes: Sartre's to the affirmation of an

[48] Cf. *ibid*., p. 360; Eng. trans. cit., p. 273.

[49] *Ibidem*.

[50] Cf. *ibid*., p. 361; Eng. trans. cit., p. 274.

[51] *Ibidem.*

[52] *Ibid*., p. 358; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 271f.

ethical humanism; Heidegger's to the negation of humanism in the name of a new ontology. I believe this comparison can lead to some interesting considerations for the theme of humanism in general.

First, in both writings so-called "classic" ontological humanism is built and defined by both philosophers as the antagonist concept, by criticizing which they can construct their different philosophical proposals. Of course there is no denying that the reference to an "essence" or "nature" of man and the Aristotelian definition, by gender and specific difference, of man as a "rational animal" have historical foundations. But that such data have actually given rise to relevant developments in the sense of an ontological humanism is yet to be demonstrated. Heidegger's reference to Plato[53] and Sartre's to Kant,[54] for instance, are generic and questionable. This shows – as I wrote at the beginning of this conclusion – that humanism is certainly culturally relevant but is nevertheless hard to define, as it has been defined more precisely by its critics than its supporters.

Second, though, there is one thing that emerges clearly from this comparison. Sartre's firm proposal to overcome ontological humanism with an ethical humanism (which is consistent with the general direction of his thought towards a strongly ethical existential analytics) and Heidegger's proposal to overcome the metaphysical ontology of being with a new fundamental ontology of Being (which entails the abandonment of humanism *and* of ethics) both show that ethics is the sphere where the fate of humanism is at stake. This seems to me to be in perfect accordance with the emergences of humanism in the previous history of thought – for instance, in the Greek *παιδεία*, in the Roman *humanitas*, or in Pico della Mirandola's humanism.

Epistemological Humanism

The crisis of World War II raised the question of the end of humanism and the possibility of its rebirth – expressed, among others, by Jean Beauffret in his letter. However, the crisis, even bigger and deeper, which followed World War I had already raised that question. From many sides and in different ways, but converging on this point, the impotence of European culture and Western philosophy in the face of catastrophic events that had swept over Europe was dramatically denounced: the scientific and philosophical reason was unable not only to prevent, but also to understand, with its abstract concepts, the drama of Western man facing the scandal of mass death, unjustified and unnecessary suffering, the loss of any sense of life and of history.

One of the voices that more passionately stood up to denounce the crisis of European humanism and to propose a way for its reaffirmation, as we know, was that of Edmund Husserl. His posthumous work, *Die Krisis der europäischen*

[53] Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*, cit., pp. 235f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 180f.

[54] Cf. J.- P. SARTRE, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, cit., pp. 20f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 22.

Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie,[55] is made up in its first two parts of a re-elaborated cycle of conferences he held in November 1935 at the "Cercle Philosophique de Prague pour les recherches sur l'entendement humain," at the German University and the Czech University of Prague. This reworking was later published by Husserl, in 1936, in the first volume of the journal "Philosophia," published in Belgrade by Arthur Liebert. Husserl had anticipated the perspective expressed in *Krisis* in a conference entitled *Die Philosophie in der Krisis der Europäischen Menschhentums,* held on 7 May 1935 at the "*Wiener Kulturbund*" in Vienna.[56] In this work, which aroused a lively debate, Husserl doesn't thematize – not even in passing – the ontological conception of man and the humanism corresponding to it, but rather an idea of humanity and of humanism as an epistemological foundation, which the sciences have lost sight of and the new transcendental phenomenology has to reaffirm.

To compare this perspective and the radically opposite one, I shall leave out the direct reactions that historically immediately followed and consider Michel Foucault's stance in *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines,*[57] published in Paris by Gallimard in 1966. I chose this text both because it seems to me that it presents a truly radical critique of epistemological humanism, and because this criticism is highly representative of and influential on the current postmodern culture.

I will not discuss here Husserl's and Foucault's works, nor will I provide a general overview of them given their large and well-deserved notoriety; I will just take under consideration some parts and only in relation to the issue considered here: the proposal and criticism of epistemological humanism. The name "Europe" and the corresponding adjective "European" do not appear in Husserl's work as a simple geographical connotation, but as synthetizing all the key-concepts of its perspective: science, philosophy, reason, history, teleology, humanity, sense. In the Vienna conference he explains: "How is the spiritual shape of Europe to be characterized? Thus we refer to Europe not as it is understood geographically, as on a map, as if thereby the group of people who live together in this territory would define European humanity. In the spiritual sense the English Dominions, the United States, etc., clearly belong to Europe, whereas the Eskimos or Indians presented as curiosities at fairs, or the Gypsies, who constantly wander about Europe, do not. Here the title 'Europe' clearly refers to the unity of a spiritual life, activity, creation, with all its

[55] E. HUSSERL, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, in IDEM, *Husserliana*, Band VI, hrg. von W. Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff, Haag 1954; Eng. trans. D. Car, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1970.

[56] Published as *Die Krisis des Europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie*, an appendix of E. HUSSERL, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, cit.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 269–299.

[57] M. FOUCAULT, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Gallimard, Paris 1966; Eng. trans., Routledge, London and New York 2002.

ends, interests, cares, and endeavors, with its products of purposeful activity, institutions (…).

'The spiritual shape of Europe' – what is it? [We must] exhibit the philosophical idea which is immanent in the history of Europe (spiritual Europe) or, what is the same, the teleology which is immanent in it, which makes itself known, from the standpoint of universal mankind as such, as the breakthrough and the developmental beginning of a new human epoch – the epoch of mankind which now seeks to live, and only can live, in the free shaping of its existence, its historical life, through ideas of reason, through infinite tasks."[58]

To try to unravel the complex set of meanings that Husserl collects under "the title 'Europe'," it seems to me that it may be useful to briefly go over his Vienna conference. Husserl declares from the beginning the main purpose of his journey: to highlight the reason for the "European crisis" and explain "the philosophical-historical idea (or the teleological sense) of European humanity."[59] This intent necessarily goes through the complaint of the objectivistic and naturalistic trend of European sciences. Indeed, not only have they reduced the knowledge of bodily nature to an objective mathematical determination of physical and chemical bodies, totally independent of the relationship with the subject, but they have also reduced the knowledge of the subject himself and his spiritual reality to an improper naturalistic understanding. This is due to a prejudice that, no longer questioned, has become a given: that is, that while bodily nature can be considered as a finite world in itself, the spirit can only be understood by considering its relationship to the body and therefore by naturalizing it.[60] This prejudice has concealed the true data of experience, for which the world is never experienced if not as "surrounding world," that is, as the surrounding environment, represented by a spiritual subject, according to the meanings, the validity and purpose of the spirit that intentionalizes it: "the historical surrounding world of the Greeks is not the objective world in our sense but rather their 'world-representation,' i.e., their own subjective validity with all the actualities which are valid for them within it, including, for example, gods, demons, etc. 'Surrounding world' is a concept that has its place exclusively in the spiritual sphere. That we live in our particular surrounding world, which is the locus of all our cares and endeavors – this refers to a fact that occurs purely within the spiritual realm. Our surrounding world is a spiritual structure in us and in our historical life. Thus there is no reason for him who makes spirit as spirit his subject matter to demand anything other than a purely spiritual explanation for it. And so generally: to look upon the nature of the surrounding world as something alien to the spirit, and consequently to want to buttress humanistic science with natural science so as to make it supposedly exact, is absurd."[61]

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[58] E. HUSSERL, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, cit., pp. 318f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 273f.

[59] *Ibid*., p. 314; Eng. trans. cit., p. 269.

[60] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 314ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 269ff.

[61] *Ibid*., p. 317; Eng. trans. cit., p. 272.

"In the interest of our Europe-problem" (*Im Interesse unseres Europa-Problems*),[62] for Husserl, not only do we have to overcome and exclude any naturalistic conception of the sciences of the spirit, but also overcome the objectivistic and naturalistic error of the sciences of nature, recognizing the essential spiritual foundation of the latter. Husserl notes: "What is obviously also completely forgotten is that natural science (like all science generally) is a title for spiritual accomplishments, namely, those of the natural scientists working together; as such they belong, after all, like all spiritual occurrences, to the region of what is to be explained by humanistic disciplines. Now is it not absurd and circular to want to explain the historical event 'natural science' in a natural – scientific way, to explain it by bringing in natural science and its natural laws, which, as spiritual accomplishment, themselves belong to the problem?"[63]

Based on this preliminary epistemological rectification, Husserl examines the significance of the "spiritual Europe" from the point of view of the spirit: as a "remarkable teleology" intrinsic to the history of the spirit and closely connected to the birth of philosophy and science in ancient Greece.[64] The concept of "humanity" – which Husserl proposes and defends, or rather tries to save from a deep crisis in which it was hidden – has really no ontological connotation, but is completely historical, even if it belongs to an ideal and radically teleological historicity, one that is not reduced to the mere succession of empirical facts, but directs and interprets such a sequence in the light of an infinite task: "we feel – Husserl writes – (and in spite of all obscurity this feeling is probably legitimate) that an entelechy is inborn in our European civilization which holds sway throughout all the changing shapes of Europe and accords to them the sense of a development toward an ideal shape of life and being as an eternal pole. Not that this is a case of one of those well-known types of purposeful striving which give the organic beings their character in the physical realm; thus it is not something like a biological development (…). They [peoples] are spiritual unities; they do not have, and in particular the supranational unity of Europe does not have, a mature shape that has ever been reached or could be reached as a shape that is regularly repeated. Psychic humanity has never been complete and never will be, and can never repeat itself. The spiritual *telos* of European humanity, in which the particular telos of particular nations and of individual men is contained, lies in the infinite, is an infinite idea toward which, in concealment, the whole spiritual becoming aims, so to speak. As soon as it becomes consciously recognized in the development as telos, it necessarily also becomes practical as a goal of the will; and thereby a new, higher stage of development is introduced which is under the guidance of norms, normative ideas."[65]

Husserl sees the origin of the "new sort of attitude" generating European culture and humanity in "the ancient Greek nation in the seventh and sixth centuries BC," when "individual men and human groups" started the theoretical activity that gave

[62] *Ibidem.*

[63] *Ibid*., pp. 317f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 272f.

[64] Cf. *ibid*., p. 318; Eng. trans. cit., p. 273.

[65] *Ibid*., p. 321; Eng. trans. cit., p. 275.

rise to philosophy and, within it, to science. Husserl writes: "In the breakthrough of philosophy in this sense, in which all sciences are thus contained, I see, paradoxical as it may sound, the primal phenomenon of spiritual Europe."[66]

The birth of philosophy occurred as a departure from the general "original attitude," for which "natural life can be characterized as a life naively, straightforwardly directed at the world, the world being always in a certain sense consciously present as a universal horizon, without, however, being thematic as such."[67] The first philosophers inaugurated a new abstract and idealizing attitude that thematises the world in its totality and truth, regardless of the practical interests of life: the "theöria," which arises as *θαυμάζειν* and then develops in the *ἐπιστήμη*. This attitude implies abstracting from any immediate practical interest so as to consider the ideal truth of the world. Husserl describes this new attitude as follows: "Sharply distinguished from this universal but mythicalpractical attitude is the 'theoretical' attitude, which is not practical in any sense used so far, the attitude of *θαυμάζειν*, to which the great figures of the first culminating period of Greek philosophy, Plato and Aristotle, traced the origin of philosophy. Man becomes gripped by the passion of a world-view and worldknowledge that turns away from all practical interests and, within the closed sphere of its cognitive activity, in the times devoted to it, strives for and achieves nothing but pure *theöria.* In other words, man becomes a nonparticipating spectator, surveyor of the world; he becomes a philosopher; or rather, from this point on his life becomes receptive to motivations which are possible only in this attitude, motivations for new sorts of goals for thought and methods through which, finally, philosophy comes to be and he becomes a philosopher."[68]

Unlike the naive attitude which pursues finite practical purposes, the new theoretical attitude is a "culture of ideas," which pursues "infinite tasks, (…) universes of idealities which as a whole and in all their details, and in their methods of production, bear infinity within themselves in keeping with their sense."[69] The *epoché* from any immediate practical and naïve goal, though, does not imply a definitive detachment from any practical interest. Rather, the theoretical approach is capable of profound influence on the practical sphere, no more immediate and naive, but mediated and reflective, for which – in the light of its infinite idea of truth and unconditional validity – it produces a new culture, theoretical and practical, a new universal humanity, a critical understanding of the world and a teleologically oriented historicity. In this passage, the echo of Plato's myth of the cave is evident: "Yet it must be said immediately that this is still not a matter of a definitive 'severing' of the theoretical from the practical life or of a division of the theoretician's concrete life into two lifecontinuities that sustain themselves without any interrelation; socially speaking, this would signify the emergence of two spiritually unrelated cultural spheres. For yet a third form of universal attitude is possible (as opposed to both the religious-mythical attitude, which is founded in the natural attitude, and the

[66] *Ibid*., p. 321; Eng. trans. cit., p. 276.

[67] *Ibid*., p. 327; Eng. trans. cit., p. 281.

[68] *Ibid*., p. 331; Eng. trans. cit., p. 285.

[69] *Ibid*., p. 324; Eng. trans. cit., p. 279.

theoretical attitude), namely, the synthesis of the two interests accomplished in the transition from the theoretical to the practical attitude, such that the *theöria* (universal science), arising within a closed unity and under the epoche of all praxis, is called (and in theoretical insight itself exhibits its calling) to serve mankind in a new way, mankind which, in its concrete existence, lives first and always in the natural sphere. This occurs in the form of a new sort of praxis, that of the universal critique of all life and all life-goals, all cultural products and systems that have already arisen out of the life of man; and thus it also becomes a critique of mankind itself and of the values which guide it explicitly or implicitly. Further, it is a praxis whose aim is to elevate mankind through universal scientific reason, according to norms of truth of all forms, to transform it from the bottom up into a new humanity made capable of an absolute self-responsibility on the basis of absolute theoretical insights."[70]

The new European culture, born in Greek philosophy, therefore opens the horizon of infinity, through an ideal and unconditionally valid concept of truth and through the historical and teleological conception of humanity as an endless idea and task. I believe that these few traits already help shed light on and clarify the plethora of concepts gathered under "the title Europe."

Reason and philosophy, as a disinterested theoretical attitude comprehending all sciences, pursue the infinite ideal of unconditioned truth: "In science the ideality of the individual products of work, the truths, does not merely denote repeatability, such that sense is identified [with what was produced before] and confirmed: the idea of truth in the sense of science is set apart (...) from the truth of the prescientific life. It wants to be unconditioned truth. This involves an infinity which gives to each factual confirmation and truth the character of being merely relative, of being a mere approach in relation precisely to that infinite horizon in which the truth-in-itself counts, so to speak, as an infinitely distant point. Correlatively, this infinity lies also in what 'actually is' in the scientific sense, as well as, again, in 'universal' validity, validity for 'everyone,' the latter being understood as the subject of all groundings ever to be accomplished; and this 'everyone' is no longer everyone in the finite sense of prescientific life."[71]

Culture and history are thus also opened to the horizon of infinity, but finding in it a new teleological form, which is the very meaning of humanity: "with the appearance of Greek philosophy and its first formulation, through consistent idealization, of the new sense of infinity, there is (…) a thoroughgoing transformation which finally draws all finite ideas and with them all spiritual culture and its [concept of] mankind into its sphere. Hence there are, for us Europeans, many infinite ideas (if we may use this expression) which lie outside the philosophical-scientific sphere (infinite tasks, goals, confirmations, truths, 'true values,' 'genuine goods,' 'absolutely' valid norms), but they owe their analogous character of infinity to the transformation of mankind through philosophy and its idealities. Scientific culture under the guidance of ideas of infinity means, then, a revolutionization [*Revolutionierung*]

[70] *Ibid*., p. 329; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 282f.

[71] *Ibid*., p. 324; Eng. trans. cit., p. 278.

of the whole culture, a revolutionization of the whole manner in which mankind creates culture. It also means a revolutionization of [its] historicity, which is now the history of the cutting-off of finite mankind's development as it becomes mankind with infinite tasks."[72]

According to Husserl, the infinite conception and task described above, which come to Europe from Greek philosophy, were resumed in the Renaissance, but were also diverted by a misunderstanding of reason, of science and of true being. Through the successes of the mathematical science of nature and, later, through the attempt to reduce even the human sciences and psychology to it, this misconception led to a perversion of reason, to a loss of the sense of science and to philosophical scepticism. This also constituted the abandonment of the authentic meaning of humanity. This wasn't an abandonment of rationalism, but rather a deviation of it, a unilateral and naïve conception of reason and reality represented by the objectivism and naturalism of science – both of nature and of the spirit – which fully triumphed in nineteenth century positivism.

Throughout the history of philosophy there have been intuitions of the opportunity to escape this error by founding reflection on the evidence of the transcendental subject. Descartes and Kant are the most famous examples given by Husserl. But even in these cases the initial intuition was missed by the very philosophers who saw a glimpse of it, so it quickly turned in the direction of objectivist and naturalistic reduction. The only real chance to get out of the current crisis, for Husserl, is the development of a new philosophy, which escapes naturalistic objectivism and founds the sense of all sciences and culture in a transcendental subjectivism: this new philosophy, which can indefinitely reach a permanent validity, is transcendental phenomenology, which he inaugurated and started to develop.

Husserl unfolds these considerations in much more depth and detail in *Krisis*, to which I refer to reader for further analysis. Here I have merely recalled the most important themes related to Husserl's conception of epistemological humanism and its decline. To point at a connection between Husserl's work and Foucault's, I shall end this brief overview by quoting a passage of the first part, which well shows this humanistic instance as the framework and principle of all the subsequent analyses on the crisis of science. Husserl writes: "The exclusiveness with which the total world-view of modern man, in the second half of the nineteenth century, let itself be determined by the positive sciences and be blinded by the 'prosperity' they produced, meant an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity. Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people. The change in public evaluation was unavoidable, especially after the war, and we know that it has gradually become a feeling of hostility among the younger generation. In our vital need – so we are told – this science has nothing to say to us. It excludes in principle precisely the questions which man, given over in our unhappy times to the most portentous upheavals, finds the most burning: questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence. Do not these questions, universal and necessary for all men, demand universal reflections and

[72] *Ibid*., p. 325; Eng. trans. cit., p. 279.

answers based on rational insight? In the final analysis they concern man as a free, selfdetermining being in his behavior toward the human and extrahuman surrounding world and free in regard to his capacities for rationally shaping himself and his surrounding world. What does science have to say about reason and unreason or about us *men* as subjects of this freedom? The mere science of bodies clearly has nothing to say; it abstracts from everything subjective. As for the humanistic sciences, on the other hand, all the special and general disciplines of which treat of man's spiritual existence, that is, within the horizon of his historicity: their rigorous scientific character requires, we are told, that the scholar carefully exclude all valuative positions, all questions of the reason or unreason of their human subject matter and its cultural configurations. Scientific, objective truth is exclusively a matter of establishing what the world, the physical as well as the spiritual world, is in fact. But can the world, and human existence in it, truthfully have a meaning if the sciences recognize as true only what is objectively established in this fashion, and if history has nothing more to teach us than that all the shapes of the spiritual world, all the conditions of life, ideals, norms upon which man relies, form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves, that it always was and ever will be so, that again and again reason must turn into nonsense, and well-being into misery? Can we console ourselves with that? Can we live in this world, where historical occurrence is nothing but an unending concatenation of illusory progress and bitter disappointment?"[73]

Let's now come to Michel Foucault's stance. As I said, while not being a direct response to Husserl, it still represents a radically opposite and highly influential position on postmodern antihumanism. In fact, while Husserl, as we have seen, recognized in the idea of humanity and those related to it (reason, history, teleology) the foundation, meaning and purpose of the entire real knowledge (philosophy and science included), of Western episteme, Foucault reverses Husserl's perspective, recognizing in the idea of humanity the product of a specific "episteme" – the modern one.

As is known, Foucault drew up the draft an "archaeology of knowledge," as opposed to the "history of ideas."[74] While the history of ideas is the interpretative effort that aims to find continuity and development in the succession of scientific discourses and theories, archaeology proposes a mere positive description of these theories in an attempt to identify and determine the very conditions the possibility of such discourses and theories in a given cultural moment. Therefore archaeology does not aim to reconstruct a historical continuity in the development of ideas, but rather to outline fundamental epistemological structures that have occurred with discontinuity in Western knowledge, without trying to explain their genesis and development – let alone the passage from one to the other. In *L'archéologie du savoir*, referring to the scientific debates characterizing the classic age, between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, Foucault writes: "It is quite possible to write a history of thought in the Classical period using these controversies as starting-points

[73] *Ibid*., pp. 3ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 5ff.

[74] Cf. M. FOUCAULT, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Gallimard, pp. 177ff.; Eng. trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, New York 1972, pp. 135ff.

or themes. But one would then be writing only a history of opinions, that is, of the choices operated according to individuals, environments, social groups; and a whole method of inquiry is thereby implied. If one wishes to undertake an archaeological analysis of knowledge itself, it is not these celebrated controversies that ought to be used as the guidelines and articulation of such a project. One must reconstitute the general system of thought whose network, in its positivity, renders an interplay of simultaneous and apparently contradictory opinions possible. It is this network that defines the conditions that make a controversy or problem possible, and that bears the historicity of knowledge."[75]

Thus, archaeology identifies and describes, without wanting to explain them, different and discontinuous epistemological situations that determined the Western episteme. Taking up Husserl's expression, but modifying its meaning, Foucault speaks of "historical a priori" to define those epistemological structures, which positively assert themselves and explain the very possibility of the entire culture of an era, without being explained themselves: "Quite obviously, such an analysis does not belong to the history of ideas or of science: it is rather an inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical a priori, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed, only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon afterwards. I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an 'archaeology'."[76]

Foucault identifies "two great discontinuities in the episteme of Western culture,"[77] defining three different ages: the Renaissance (until the mid-seventeenth century), the classical era (until the early nineteenth century), and the modern era in which we live.

These brief introductory remarks, which summarize the key elements – well known, after all – of Foucault's concept of "archaeology" could not be omitted in introducing the concept and criticism of humanism he carried out. As I noted above, it constitutes a real reversal of Husserl's perspective. According to Foucault, the idea of man and the humanistic perspective is not the transcendental foundation – lost in the crisis of European sciences and to be rediscovered by new and definitive

[75] M. FOUCAULT, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, cit., p. 89; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 82f.

[76] *Ibid*., p. 13; Eng. trans. cit., pp. XXIIIf.

[77] *Ibid*., p. 13; Eng. trans. cit., p. XXIV.

perennial philosophy, that is, by transcendental phenomenology, as it is for Husserl – but it is rather a very recent concept, distinctive of modern episteme. In many respects it is problematic and is already being overcome, in the opening of a new episteme, which for now we do not see clearly, but which we nevertheless positively experience. Already in the *Préface* to his work, Foucault warns: "Strangely enough, man – the study of whom is supposed by the naïve to be the oldest investigation since Socrates – is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position he has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge. Whence all the chimeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an 'anthropology' understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical. It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form."[78]

Therefore, for Foucault, man is not at all the foundation, the meaning and goal of episteme, but it is itself the fleeting and transitory product of a specific episteme, soon destined to the oblivion of knowledge.

Reflecting on the metaphor of Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, in which the King appears reflected in the mirror at centre of the stage but is absent in the room shown in the picture, Foucault highlights how in classical culture man is object and subject of the representation, but it is not thematized as such: "In Classical thought, the personage for whom the representation exists, and who represents himself within it, recognizing himself therein as an image or reflection, he who ties together all the interlacing threads of the 'representation in the form of a picture or table' – he is never to be found in that table himself. Before the end of the eighteenth century, *man* did not exist (...). He is a quite recent creature, which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred years ago: but he has grown old so quickly that it has been only too easy to imagine that he had been waiting for thousands of years in the darkness for that moment of illumination in which he would finally be known (...). There is no doubt that the natural sciences dealt with man as with a species or a genus (...). Again, general grammar and economics made use of such notions as need and desire, or memory and imagination. But there was no epistemological consciousness of man as such."[79]

In the classical era, in fact, the episteme is based on the evident truth of the order of representation, or rather of double representation. In that order the being of things (that is, "nature") has its place in the representation, and "human nature" (the knowledge of things) has its place in the "discourse." More precisely, it takes place in "naming," which is a duplication of the representation that allows for a "painting:" a continuous order of the differences of things in an overall similarity, so continuous as to constitute an identity, and, at the same time, to distinguish and articulate this identity in differences without interrupting the continuity. In discourse, therefore, nature and human nature converge and work together to build a

[78] *Ibid*., p. 15; Eng. trans. cit., p. XXV.

[79] *Ibid*., pp. 319f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 336.

concord knowledge of representation and being: "at the meeting-point between representation and being, at the point where nature and human nature intersect – at the place in which we believe nowadays that we can recognize the primary, irrefutable, and enigmatic existence of man – what Classical thought reveals is the power of discourse."[80]

In classical episteme, therefore, man is never thematized neither as a particular object of knowledge, nor as a sovereign subject of it: "in the general arrangement of the Classical episteme, nature, human nature, and their relations, are definite and predictable functional moments. And man, as a primary reality with his own density, as the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge, has no place in it. The modern themes of an individual who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of an economics, a philology, and a biology, but who also, by a sort of internal torsion and overlapping, has acquired the right, through the interplay of those very laws, to know them and to subject them to total clarification – all these themes so familiar to us today and linked to the existence of the 'human sciences' are excluded by Classical thought: it was not possible at that time that there should arise, on the boundary of the world, the strange stature of a being whose nature (that which determines it, contains it, and has traversed it from the beginning of time) is to know nature, and itself, in consequence, as a natural being."[81]

Only by blurring the evidence of representative discourse, that is, only by leaving classical episteme and starting the modern one can the undisputed link between representation and being break and raise the question on human existence – on man as such. Taking up a consideration on the problematic Cartesian identity between "I think" and "I am" – which had already been highlighted by several objectors of the Cartesian Meditations since when were first drawn, but which Husserl discussed in a particular way as Descartes' lost opportunity to take the virtuous path of analytics of the transcendental subject[82] – and taking up this consideration in Husserl's sense, Foucault highlights this new epistemological condition, which allows for the new centrality of man and human sciences: "Classical language, as the *common discourse* of representation and things, as the place within which nature and human nature intersect, absolutely excludes anything that could be a 'science of man.' As long as that language was spoken in Western culture it was not possible for human existence to be called in question on its own account, since it contained the nexus of representation and being. The discourse that, in the seventeenth century, provided the link between the 'I think' and the 'I am' of the being undertaking it – that very discourse remained, in a visible form, the very essence of Classical language, for what was being linked together in it was representation and being. The transition from the 'I think' to the 'I am' was accomplished in the light of evidence, within a discourse whose whole domain and functioning consisted in articulating one upon

[80] *Ibid*., p. 321; Eng. trans. cit., p. 338.

[81] *Ibidem*.

[82] Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, cit., §§ 16–20 and relative *Beilagen* V-IX, pp. 74–85 and 392–419; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 73–83 and 343–395.

the other what one represents to oneself and what is. It cannot, therefore, be objected to this transition either that being in general is not contained in thought, or that the singular being as designated by the 'I am' has not been interrogated or analysed on his own account. Or rather, these objections may well arise and command respect, but only on the basis of a discourse which is profoundly other, and which does not have for its *raison d'être* the link between representation and being; only a problematics able to by-pass representation would formulate such objections. But as long as Classical discourse lasted, no interrogation as to the mode of being implied by the *cogito* could be articulated."[83]

With the vanishing of the sovereign and evident role of representation in ordering words and things, the vacancy of the subject is filled by a new presence that is both object and subject of knowledge: man in his concrete existence – both as represented and as gaze that allows for the representation – is the central point that any representation refers to. Taking up again the metaphor of Velasquez's painting, Foucault writes: "When (...) Classical *discourse*, in which being and representation found their common locus, is eclipsed, then, in the profound upheaval of such an archaeological mutation, man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator, he appears in the place belonging to the king, which was assigned to him in advance by *Las Meninas*, but from which his real presence has for so long been excluded. As if, in that vacant space towards which Velázquez's whole painting was directed, but which it was nevertheless reflecting only in the chance presence of a mirror, and as though by stealth, all the figures whose alternation, reciprocal exclusion, interweaving, and fluttering one imagined (the model, the painter, the king, the spectator) suddenly stopped their imperceptible dance, immobilized into one substantial figure, and demanded that the entire space of the representation should at last be related to one corporeal gaze."[84]

What is absolutely the most obvious in modern *episteme* is not the relationship between beings and representations, but the relationship of both these things with man. That relationship is complex and ambiguous, since the man is found to be, at the same time, a being among the beings of nature and the subject that makes this knowledge possible. Man then appears on center stage in his finitude, which always has a simultaneous dual significance. On the one hand, man knows himself as finite, since he experiences himself as always already immersed and conditioned by a world of life, production and language that pre-exists him; on the other hand, man knows this world only in reference to his own finite existence.

Of course the issue of human finitude is also found in the classic era. In it, however, this finitude is thought in reference to infinity, of which it is a negation or limitation (this is true, as is known, in Descartes, as well as in many other thinkers of the time). In the classic era, therefore, man's finitude is thought in reference to a metaphysics of infinity. In the modern era, instead, man's finitude is only referred to

[83] M. FOUCAULT, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, cit., pp, 322f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 339f.

[84] *Ibid*., p. 323; Eng. trans. cit., p. 340.

itself and it is itself the foundation of knowledge. Foucault writes: "the limitation is expressed not as a determination imposed upon man from outside (because he has a nature or a history), but as a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but its own existence as fact, and opens upon the positivity of all concrete limitation."[85]

Metaphysics was therefore replaced by an analytic of the finitude of human existence, in which the latter is understood both from the empirical positivity of the conditions determining it, and in its foundational and transcendental role of origin and condition of possibility and meaning of all knowledge of things: "the end of metaphysics is only the negative side of a much more complex event in Western thought. This event is the appearance of man (...). No doubt, on the level of appearances, modernity begins when the human being begins to exist within his organism (...); when he begins to exist at the centre of a labour by whose principles he is governed and whose product eludes him; when he lodges his thought in the folds of a language so much older than himself that he cannot master its significations, even though they have been called back to life by the insistence of his words. But, more fundamentally, our culture crossed the threshold beyond which we recognize our modernity when finitude was conceived in an interminable cross-reference with itself. Though it is true, at the level of the various branches of knowledge, that finitude is always designated on the basis of man as a concrete being and on the basis of the empirical forms that can be assigned to his existence, nevertheless, at the archaeological level, which reveals the general, historical *a priori* of each of those branches of knowledge, modern man – that man assignable in his corporeal, labouring, and speaking existence – is possible only as a figuration of finitude. Modern culture can conceive of man because it conceives of the finite on the basis of itself."[86]

Man therefore appears on the modern scene as "a strange doublet" (*un étrange doublet*),[87] both determined by his empirical finitude and constituting the origin and foundation of all knowledge. For this reason anthropology, which is the centre of modern knowledge, oscillates between two things. On the one hand, there is what Foucault sees "as a sort of transcendental aesthetics:"[88] that is, a positivist knowledge that seeks the truth of man in the set of empirical conditions of his existence. On the other hand there is what Foucault defines "a sort of transcendental dialectic:"[89] an eschatological knowledge that seeks to pre-empt the truth, which will be unveiled by the indeterminate natural and historical development of human existence.

Both these anthropological perspectives remain part of "pre-critical naïveté."[90] Critical anthropology only begins with the attempt of an "analytic" of human existence, which Foucault clearly recognizes in Husserl's transcendental phenomenological philosophy: "modern thought has been unable to avoid – and precisely from the starting-point of this naïve discourse – searching for the locus of

[85] *Ibid*., p. 326; Eng. trans. cit., p. 343.

[86] *Ibid*., pp. 328f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 346.

[87] *Ibid*., p. 329; Eng. trans. cit., p. 347.

[88] *Ibid*., p. 330; Eng. trans. cit., p. 347.

[89] *Ibid*., p. 330; Eng. trans. cit., p. 348.

[90] Cf. *ibid*., p. 331; Eng. trans. cit., p. 349.

a discourse that would be neither of the order of reduction nor of the order of promise: a discourse whose tension would keep separate the empirical and the transcendental, while being directed at both; a discourse that would make it possible to analyse man as a subject, that is, as a locus of knowledge which has been empirically acquired but referred back as closely as possible to what makes it possible, and as a pure form immediately present to those contents; a discourse, in short, which in relation to quasi-aesthetics and quasi-dialectics would play the role of an analytic which would at the same time give them a foundation in a theory of the subject and perhaps enable them to articulate themselves in that third and intermediary term in which both the experience of the body and that of culture would be rooted. Such a complex, over-determined, and necessary role has been performed in modern thought by the analysis of actual experience."[91]

For Foucault, though, this attempt is "a discourse of mixed nature"[92] that does not escape the fluctuation between empiricism and eschatology, but rather tries to reconcile them. The new route really should be marked by a radical break with humanism: "The true contestation of positivism and eschatology – writes Foucault – does not lie, therefore, in a return to actual experience (which rather, in fact, provides them with confirmation by giving them roots); but if such a contestation could be made, it would be from the starting-point of a question which may well seem aberrant, so opposed is it to what has rendered the whole of our thought historically possible. This question would be: Does man really exist?"[93]

This is the path of overcoming radical humanism shown by Nietzsche and reproposed by Foucault. Where this overcoming leads is not yet clear, and Foucault acknowledges that he himself does not have the answers about the news being announced. Yet, an indication – not a determination – of the direction in which this may go is given by the "destiny"[94] of language in modernity. This destiny is marked by the "disappearance of Discourse:"[95] an epochal phenomenon that, truth be told, has determined and accompanied the whole modern era, but that in its most mature developments allows one to envision its overcoming, connected with the overcoming of the "anthropological sleep."[96]

In the classical era, the discourse is the sovereign place where words determine and order the representations in a trusted framework of the being of things. The end of this era and the advent of new modern *episteme* occurred precisely with "disappearance of Discourse" and the following dispersion of language. Foucault writes: "The threshold between Classicism and modernity (...) had been definitively crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, they rediscovered their ancient, enigmatic density; though not in order to restore the

[91] *Ibid*., pp. 331f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 349.

[92] Cf. *ibid*., p. 332; Eng. trans. cit., p. 350.

[93] *Ibid*., p. 332; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 350f.

[94] Cf. *ibid*., p. 315; Eng. trans. cit., p. 332.

[95] Cf. *ibid*., p. 318; Eng. trans. cit., p. 334.

[96] Cf. *ibid*., p. 351; Eng. trans. cit., p. 371.

curve of the world which had harboured them during the Renaissance, nor in order to mingle with things in a circular system of signs. Once detached from representation, language has existed, right up to our own day, only in a dispersed."[97]

The dispersion of language happened in different directions: philology, formalization, interpretation and finally "literature," in which "language may sometimes arise for its own sake in an act of writing that designates nothing other than itself."[98] This latter modality is precisely what pushes the modern *episteme* to its limits, pointing at the direction of its possible future developments: "Literature (...) leads language back from grammar to the naked power of speech, and there it encounters the untamed, imperious being of words (...) literature becomes progressively more differentiated from the discourse of ideas, and encloses itself within a radical intransitivity (...) becomes merely a manifestation of a language which has no other law than that of affirming – in opposition to all other forms of discourse – its own precipitous existence (...) a silent, cautious deposition of the word upon the whiteness of a piece of paper, where it can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being."[99]

The disappearance of discourse and the emergence of language as literature, and as such as overcoming any previous type of thinking, so also of philosophy, are closely connected with the overcoming of the "anthropological sleep" and the illusion of humanism in all its forms. These two connected phenomena determine the end of modern *episteme* and the beginning of a new era, of which we do not see the configuration yet. Nietzsche is the one who has shown both the one and the other way. In fact, on the one hand he raised the question of language in a new way, asking who speaks the language. "For it is there, in the *holder* of the discourse and, more profoundly still, in the *possessor* of the word, that language is gathered together in its entirety."[100] On the other hand, "perhaps we should see the first attempt at this uprooting of Anthropology – to which, no doubt, contemporary thought is dedicated – in the Nietzschean experience: by means of a philological critique, by means of a certain form of biologism, Nietzsche rediscovered the point at which man and God belong to one another, at which the death of the second is synonymous with the disappearance of the first, and at which the promise of the superman signifies first and foremost the imminence of the death of man."[101]

The question of Nietzsche on "who speaks" is answered by literature in its more fully representative figure, Mallarmé; with his work, the French poet says that no one speaks: the speaker is the word itself, not in its meaning, but in its simple being. Foucault writes: "The great task to which Mallarmé dedicated himself, right up to his death, is the one that dominates us now; in its stammerings, it embraces all our current efforts to confine the fragmented being of language once more within a perhaps impossible unity. Mallarmé's project – that of enclosing all possible

[97] *Ibid*., p. 315; Eng. trans. cit., p. 331.

[98] *Ibidem*.

[99] *Ibid*., p. 313; Eng. trans. cit., p. 327.

[100] *Ibid*., p. 316; Eng. trans. cit., p. 333.

[101] *Ibid*., p. 353; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 372f.

discourse within the fragile density of the word, within that slim, material black line traced by ink upon paper – is fundamentally a reply to the question imposed upon philosophy by Nietzsche."[102]

The disappearance of discourse and man's death, according to Foucault, do not inaugurate a new cultural form, but open a void. However – unfolding a very characteristic theme of much postmodern thought – this void is not, in the negative sense, a lack, but in a positive sense, emancipation: a space in which the new can happen: "In this, Nietzsche, offering this future to us as both promise and task, marks the threshold beyond which contemporary philosophy can begin thinking again; and he will no doubt continue for a long while to dominate its advance. If the discovery of the Return is indeed the end of philosophy, then the end of man, for its part, is the return of the beginning of philosophy. It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance. For this void does not create a deficiency; it does not constitute a lacuna that must be filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think."[103]

In concluding this examination of epistemological humanism, I would like to resume the ethical issue, which is the main theme of this essay.

The ethical commitment is declared and underlined in Husserl's programme, starting from the strong ethical connotation of the very crisis to which the programme should respond. In a passage that I have already mentioned above, Husserl describes the rebellion against a situation in which European sciences have lost their relationship with the meaning of human existence and the meaning and tasks of human beings. "Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people," he writes, and they are no longer capable of responding to "our vital need," they have nothing to say "about us *men* as subjects of this freedom."[104]

As a result, his philosophical program – the development of an apodictic philosophy, a phenomenological transcendental philosophy – is strongly characterized ethically, as the overcoming of this state of crisis and as the formulation of a thought able to find, along with the apodictic foundation of science, the ultimate meaning of human condition and man's ethical commitment in his historical existence oriented to the endless task of the realization of humanity. This task is entrusted above all and especially to philosophy, because it coincides with the task of the development of reason in its apodictic validity. Only philosophy (and, in it, all sciences) can properly indicate the sense of man, of his life and history, because only reason is able to apodictically found this sense: humanism is rationalism, just like reason, authentically developed, is the foundation of the sense of humanity. Husserl writes: "the collapse of the belief in a universal philosophy as the guide for the new man, actually represents a collapse of the belief in 'reason,' understood as the ancients

[102] *Ibid*., p. 316; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 332f.

[103] *Ibid*., p. 353; Eng. trans. cit., p. 373.

[104] E. HUSSERL, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, cit., p. 4; Eng. trans. cit., p. 6.

opposed *episteme* to *doxa.* It is reason which ultimately gives meaning to everything that is thought to be, all things, values, and ends – their meaning understood as their normative relatedness to what, since the beginnings of philosophy, is meant by the word 'truth' – truth in itself – and correlatively the term 'what is' – '*ὄντως ὄν.*' Along with this falls the faith in 'absolute' reason, through which the world has its meaning, the faith in the meaning of history, of humanity, the faith in man's freedom, that is, his capacity to secure rational meaning for his individual and common human existence.

If man loses this faith, it means nothing less than the loss of faith ,'in himself,' in his own true being. This true being is not something he always already has, with the self-evidence of the 'I am,' but something he only has and can have in the form of the struggle for his truth, the struggle to make himself true. True being is *everywhere* an ideal goal, a task of *episteme* or 'reason,' as opposed to being which through *doxa* is merely thought to be, unquestioned and 'obvious.' Basically every person is acquainted with this difference – one related to his true and genuine humanity – just as truth as a goal or task is not unknown to him even in everyday life – though here it is merely isolated and relative. But this prefiguration is surpassed by philosophy: in its first, original establishment, ancient philosophy, it conceives of and takes as its task the exalted idea of universal knowledge concerning the totality of what is."[105]

This fundamental role of philosophy entails a specific ethical commitment on part of the philosopher; "great authentic ethos that constitutes (…) philosophy" entails "the spirit of personal and radical responsibility" of the philosopher.[106] This responsibility, which Husserl recognizes in Descartes and Kant,[107] must be owned also by contemporary philosophers as "*functionaries of mankind*." Husserl writes: "Precisely herein lies our own plight – the plight of all of us who are not philosophical literati but who, educated by the genuine philosophers of the great past, live for truth, who only in this way are and seek to be in our own truth. But as philosophers of the present we have fallen into a painful existential contradiction. The faith in the possibility of philosophy as a task, that is, in the possibility of universal knowledge, is something we *cannot* let go. We *know* that we are *called* to this task as serious philosophers. And yet, how do we hold onto this belief, which has meaning only in relation to the single goal which is common to us all, that is, philosophy as such?

We have also become aware in the most general way [through the foregoing reflections] that human philosophizing and its results in the whole of man's existence mean anything but merely private or otherwise limited cultural goals. In *our* philosophizing, then – how can we avoid it? – we are *functionaries of mankind.* The quite personal responsibility of our own true being as philosophers, our inner personal vocation, bears within itself at the same time the responsibility for the true being of mankind; the latter is, necessarily, being toward a *telos* and can only come to realization, *if at all,* through philosophy – through *us, if* we are philosophers in all

[105] *Ibid*., pp. 10f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 12f.

[106] Cf. *ibid*., p. 427.

[107] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 427ff.

seriousness. Is there, in this existential 'if,' a way out? If not, what should we, who *believe,* do in order to *be able* to believe? We cannot seriously continue our previous philosophizing; it lets us hope only for philosophies, never for philosophy."[108]

Husserl's answer to this question is well known: it consists in claiming the possibility of an absolutely valid philosophy, which he tirelessly attempts to formulate and develop in his transcendental phenomenology. This also leads to an important feature of his humanism. Beyond any ontological conception of man, which Husserl does not even bother to contest, he pursues a clearly epistemological humanism, which certainly entails, as we have seen, a deep ethical commitment, but whose foundation is markedly theoretic. The theoretical and apodictic truth pursued by reason is the only and true foundation of man's existential sense, of the epistemological sense of science, of the teleological sense of history. The "demand of apodicticity,"[109] rightly understood, is the new beginning of philosophy, which is related (consistently, indeed) with the truth of its own tradition. This apodictic philosophy is grounded in "the deepest and most universal self-understanding of the philosophizing ego as the bearer of absolute reason coming to itself" and, in addition to founding "the discovery of absolute intersubjectivity" and "the new discovery (...) of the 'existing world'"[110] ensures "a new meaning (…) to human existence: [man's] existence in the spatio-temporally pregiven world as the self-objectification of transcendental subjectivity and its being, its constituting life; what follows this is the ultimate self-understanding of man as being responsible for his own human being; *his self-understanding as being in being called to a life of apodicticity,* not only in abstractly practicing apodictic science in the usual sense but [as being mankind] which realises is whole concrete being in apodictic freedom by becoming apodictic mankind in the whole active life of its reason – through which it is human; as I said, mankind understanding itself as rational, understanding that it is rational in seeking to be rational; that this signifies an infinity of living and striving towards reason; that reason is precisely that which man *qua* man, in his innermost being, is aiming for, that which alone can satisfy him, make him 'blessed;' that reason allows for no differentiation into 'theoretical,' 'practical,' 'aesthetic,' or whatever; that being human is teleological being and an ought-to-be, and that this teleology holds sway in each and every activity and project of an ego; that through self-understanding in all this it can know the apodictic telos; and that this knowing the ultimate self-understanding, has no other form than self-understanding according to a priori principles as self-understanding in the form of philosophy."[111]

As for the presence of the ethical theme Foucault's contestation of epistemological humanism, there is not much to say. In *Les mots et les choses* this theme is barely mentioned. A relevant consideration in this regard only appears in one passage. According to Foucault, by focusing on human knowledge, modernity also posits its Other, the unthought-of, the dark side, which has to be understood, comprehended

[108] *Ibid*., pp. 15f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 17.

[109] Cf. *ibid*., p. 274;. Eng. trans. cit., p. 340.

[110] Cf. *ibid*., p. 275;. Eng. trans. cit., p. 340.

[111] *Ibid*., pp. 275f., Eng. trans. cit., pp. 340f.

and lead back to identity.[112] This characteristic structure reveals the fundamentally "ethical" nature of modernity. Modern thought – in Hegel as in Marx, Freud, Husserl – despite failing to produce a morality, is ethical in its foundation, because thinking is always thinking the unthought-of, and this means acting on it, transforming it, bringing back it to the identical. Foucault writes: "In modern experience, the possibility of establishing man within knowledge and the mere emergence of this new figure in the field of the *episteme* imply an imperative that haunts thought from within; it matters little whether it be given currency in the form of ethics, politics, humanism, a duty to assume responsibility for the fate of the West, or the mere consciousness of performing, in history, a bureaucratic function. What is essential is that thought, both for itself and in the density of its workings, should be both knowledge and a modification of what it knows, reflection and a transformation of the mode of being of that on which it reflects. Whatever it touches it immediately causes to move: it cannot discover the unthought-of, or at least move towards it, without immediately bringing the unthought-of nearer to itself – or even, perhaps, without pushing it further away, and in any case without causing man's own being to undergo a change by that very fact, since it is deployed in the distance between them."[113]

Therefore, for Foucault, modern ethics does not consist in the development of theories that found the validity of a good deed; in the identification of ideas, ideals, goals for the just man; in the construction of value systems or doctrines of virtues: more radically, it lies in the constitutively practical character of thought, which transforms by knowing, acts by thinking: "Modern thought has never, in fact, been able to propose a morality. But the reason for this is not because it is pure speculation; on the contrary, modern thought, from its inception and in its very density, is a certain mode of action."[114]

This character of modern thought has always been known, but often not recognized. Only a few voices were raised in modernity to reveal this truth and, not surprisingly, these voices are those who, along with this deception, also revealed the deception of humanism: "For modern thought, no morality is possible. Thought had already 'left' itself in its own being as early as the nineteenth century; it is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites; it cannot help but liberate and enslave. Even before prescribing, suggesting a future, saying what must be done, even before exhorting or merely sounding an alarm, thought, at the level of its existence, in its very dawning, is in itself an action – a perilous act. Sade, Nietzsche, Artaud, and Bataille have understood this on behalf of all those who tried to ignore it."[115]

Of course, many aspects of this Foucault's analysis can be discussed – among other things, whether this characteristic of modern thought (if one were to admit its truth) is correctly recognized as "ethical." In fact, while there is no question that this

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[112] Cf. M. FOUCAULT, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, cit., p. 337; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 355f.

[113] *Ibid*., p. 338; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 356f.

[114] *Ibid*., p. 339; Eng. trans. cit., p. 357.

[115] *Ibidem*.

is a "practical" character of thought, which is always realized as a transforming action, it can be questioned whether it is also an "ethical" character, which involves not only the recognition of thought as action, but also as a "good" action. However, I shall not dwell on this and other aspects that might be usefully discussed, so as not to move away from the topic. Rather, I wish to insist on an aspect I have already mentioned: Nietzsche and the other names mentioned by Foucault as the voices that revealed once and for all the lie of modern ethics, thus understood, are also the voices that are generally recognized among the most significant references of postmodern culture. Here, as in general in the writings of Foucault, the concept of postmodernism is not presented as a radical change from modernity. Here but also in general, he rather tends to show a development of modernity that exceeds modernity itself: here as referred to the disappearance of discourse or the overcoming of humanism. It seems to me that, in an anti-historical perspective as that of Foucault and many other philosophers of postmodernism, the difference between the one and the other conception is not fundamental. What seems more important for the theme dealt with here is the question: after the revelation and overcoming of modern ethics and, with it, of humanism, is there a new ethics? And if so how is this ethics connoted? On this issue we find no useful considerations in *Les mots et les choses*. It is well known that in the last period of his thought Foucault has turned his attention to an analysis and explicit and complex critique of power, as well as to a proposal for liberation from it through "self-care." Many of his interpreters have seen this as an ethical declination of his thinking, and he himself has also spoken in this sense. But I refrain here from following these developments, because they undoubtedly relate to the prospect of a no longer humanistic, or rather anti-humanistic, culture and therefore are no longer relevant to the examination of epistemological humanism and its contestation, which is the subject of this reflection.

A Postmodern Humanism?

At the beginning of this essay, I touched upon the main argument, that is, whether humanistic thought can or cannot be applied to today's society, which is based on realized capitalism and postmodern culture. It is finally time to tackle the issue. In 1945, Jean Beaufret asked: "*Comment redonner un sens au mot 'Humanisme'?*"[116] This question could be asked again today, obviously bearing in mind that seventy years have passed and the current cultural circumstances are quite different. For Beaufret, in fact, the point was to revive humanism in a post-World War II society and in a culture affected by the crisis of modernity. Today, instead, this question relates to realized capitalism and postmodern culture.

However, the first preliminary step for a meaningful reflection is to provide a convincing justification of the question itself. In fact, why should one want to propose a humanistic thought? What makes it necessary? The answer lies in a theme

[116] Cf. *supra*, p. 197.

that is present throughout all the previous parts of this essay and that, I think, relates to at least one aspect of Beaufret's question. In fact, Heidegger quotes a passage of the letter – which, as far as know, is not known in its entirety – in which the writer proposes a new meaning for the question: "*Ce que je cherche à faire, depuis longtemps déjà, c'est preciser le rapport de l'ontologie avec une éthique possible*."[117]

By briefly summarizing the debates on ontological humanism and epistemological humanism, I have consistently tried to show that, regardless of the definitions and perspectives they brought forward, the advocates and opponents of humanism have opposed each other's proposals also from an ethical point of view. Sartre and Husserl, the promoters of humanism that I briefly mentioned above, have claimed that ethics is important for culture and philosophy. Their opponents Heidegger and Foucault, instead, have denied it or turned it into the vague and ambiguous concept of a new ethics resulting either in one aspect of the new ontology (Heidegger) or in a generic reference to the practical nature of thought (Foucault). However, I think that an ethical issue is and remains the central question of humanism: a non-humanistic or anti-humanistic thought lacks the ability to authentically recognize and establish the ethical dimension of society and culture, or – more radically – denies it. This radical thesis is not mine, but Kant's. According to the philosopher, only an autonomous ethics is properly founded and valid, while no heteronomous ethics can reach an acceptable level of validity. This means that ethics can only be founded on the unconditional and legislative freedom of human reason. Kant thinks that reason is a prerogative of both man and God; however – while not excluding a potential accordance between moral law and divine commandments – the autonomy of the will still requires the purity of moral determinacy and the will's independence from any external motive. Moral anthropocentrism (and ethical humanism as well) is not only the unsurpassed Kantian lesson in modernity, but also the founding condition for a possible ethics in any cultural context. Postmodern society and culture – based on the economic prevalence of the utilitarian exchange economy and on the influence of masters of doubt like Nietzsche – have consequently produced predominantly non-humanistic or anti-humanistic ideologies and unethical or anti-ethical ideologies. Foucault rightly highlighted that "Nietzsche rediscovered the point at which man and God belong to one another, at which the death of the second is synonymous with the disappearance of the first, and at which the promise of the superman signifies first and foremost the imminence of the death of man."[118] However, I think it necessary to also say that the death of man implies the death of ethics as well.

Albeit supported by the prevalence of unethical or anti-ethical ideologies among the philosophies of postmodernism, this is neither the only possible outcome nor the necessary perspective for a postmodern thought. Of course, humanist and ethical thinking can only be alternative and dysfunctional for postmodern society and culture; however, this does not preclude its possibility (I do not use the terms "antagonistic" and "critical" because they would imply the need to discuss their possibility).

[117] Cf. *supra*, p. 199.

[118] Cf. *supra*, p. 215.

This thinking rather enters with full rights into the wide philosophical reflection aiming to find an alternative and dysfunctional function to a system that is anything but easy to construct. After all, there are quite a few postmodern philosophical perspectives that offer a new proposal of humanism and ethics, even though this may not be the predominant trend. My considerations intend to follow this direction.

Once the importance of the question of humanism has been justified, it is time to ask oneself whether and how to propose a humanistic thought in our culture. As I said at the beginning of this essay, it would seem reasonable to start from a conceptual definition of "human" so as to develop a project based on it. As we have seen, this definition unfortunately is not available because none of the proposed ones is immune from criticism and, very often, they are formulated by the very same people who want to question them, in such a way that they can do that. The undefined nature of the concept of "human" – but also of a human being as such – was already apparent in the debates I have previously mentioned. A human being is an undetermined entity that cannot be enclosed into any definition without being deprived of her diversity and the surprising richness of her possible transformations. This is the underlying reason for the inexhaustible plurality and diversity of human cultures, in which man builds, qualifies and determines himself. Of course, man has both a natural and a cultural dimension. However, the natural dimension (albeit obviously essential) is so secondary to the cultural one that one could say man is the outcome of culture – or rather, of all the various and different cultures. For this reason, any attempt to understand humankind in a naturalistic way is so simplistic that it cannot even be taken seriously. "Human nature" is certainly an important concept for different cultures, though not as mere biological fact, but because it is itself a culturally elaborated idea. The first reason why the issue of pluralism – which rightly affects and worries every civil society – is so tricky is that the cultures that have to coexist are largely and radically different and affect the very self-understanding of the people participating in them.

If a definition of human being cannot be established and man is indefinable, this vagueness seems to be the only feature, so to speak, that specifies and distinguishes him from other entities such as animals. There is no doubt that – though some higher animal species are capable of certain plasticity and one can therefore speak of animal cultural attitudes in some cases – human indeterminacy is far superior to that of every other being. This indeterminacy, however, does not characterize man sufficiently and must be complemented by at least two other very important aspects. If *man is an indeterminate being,* one must also add that *man is a highly determinable being* and, lastly, that *man is capable of self-determination.* These three features result in a physiognomy – if not a definition – of man that, despite the inability to rely on a definition, can help to reflect on him.

This is the essential meaning of the beautiful myth that Pico della Mirandola narrated in his 1486 oration *De hominis dignitate*. The text is well known, but I will quote it here for the reader's pleasure. "God the Father, the Mightiest Architect, had already raised, according to the precepts of His hidden wisdom, this world we see, the cosmic dwelling of divinity, a temple most august. He had already adorned the supercelestial region with Intelligences, infused the heavenly globes with the life of

immortal souls and set the fermenting dump-heap of the inferior world teeming with every form of animal life. But when this work was done, the Divine Artificer still longed for some creature which might comprehend the meaning of so vast an achievement, which might be moved with love at its beauty and smitten with awe at its grandeur. When, consequently, all else had been completed (as both Moses and Timaeus testify), in the very last place, He bethought Himself of bringing forth man. Truth was, however, that there remained no archetype according to which He might fashion a new offspring, nor in His treasure-houses the wherewithal to endow a new son with a fitting inheritance, nor any place, among the seats of the universe, where this new creature might dispose himself to contemplate the world. All space was already filled; all things had been attributed in the highest, the middle and the lowest orders. Still, it was not in the nature of the power of the Father to fail in this creative élan; nor was it in the nature of that supreme Wisdom to hesitate through lack of counsel in so crucial a matter; nor, finally, in the nature of His beneficent love to compel the creature destined to praise the divine generosity in all other things to find it wanting in himself. At last, the Supreme Maker decreed that this creature, to whom He could give nothing wholly his own, should have a share in the particular endowment of every other creature. Taking man, therefore, this creature of indeterminate image, He set him in the middle of the world and thus spoke to him: 'We have given you, Oh Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very centre of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of heart, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to raise again to the superior orders whose life is divine'."[119]

With this admirable passage, Pico celebrates the indefinite man as the greatest creature of the universe: "Who then will not look with awe upon this our chameleon, or who, at least, will look with greater admiration on any other being? This creature, man, whom Asclepius the Athenian, by reason of this very mutability, this nature capable of transforming itself, quite rightly said was symbolized in the mysteries by the figure of Proteus."[120] That of man as an indeterminate being, able to freely determine himself, is a theme that runs through the entire history of thought, starting

[119] G. PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. by E. Garin, Vallecchi, Firenze 1942, pp. 105–107. Eng. trans. by A. Robert Caponigri, Gateway Edition, Washington 1956, p. 5–8.

[120] *Ibid*., p. 107; Eng. trans. cit. p. 8.

from the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus in Plato's *Protogaras*, going on during the Middle Ages and reaching the modern age. However, this subject has also been elaborated negatively, and its meaning has been distorted – consider Nietzsche.[121] Furthermore, this theme also emerges in postmodern philosophy and, in particular, in Michel Serres, who distances himself from the prevailing current of Nietzcheism. In *Genèse*, he writes: "I think that one can still think of man, universally. But this universal is empty and blank. A universal perverse, man is without attribute. God who had all of them took them all away from him, in the garden between two seas.

God who had all of them gave them all, one by one, to the world, to the plants, to the animals. At the very end of his work, he had nothing left in his ends. He moulded man out of this nothing, plain water and soft loam. Man is this last nothing trying to imitate the other creatures.

Upon emerging from the blaze of his hypothetical author, Adam, blank, starts to dance. On coming out of the confinement within supralapsarian lover, Eva dances with Adam. Man the dancer and the blank white dancer-woman are our first parents.

This is their fault, a fault is a lack, they lack everything. And we still lack any determination.

Then they left, so we leave the page blank."[122]

However, Serres himself produces this blank page by writing. He therefore confirms that one can experience and think the undetermined and most originary blank of every form only by constantly looking for the form.

So, if humanistic thought cannot be derived from any preconceived determination of man (neither ontologically nor epistemologically), the only solution left is to develop it according to the multiform determinability *in fieri* that, as we have seen, characterizes man. One must therefore reflect on the "human" attributes rather than the definition of "human being." Humanism, in its truest and most original tradition, must not be understood as man's culture, but rather as a human culture: one that is prone to develop and realize the "human" attributes whilst avoiding or eliminating the "non-human" or "anti-human" ones. Pursuing and realizing the human will produce man – not vice versa.

"Humaneness," therefore, is not a noun but an attribute, or rather a set of attributes. So the debate on humaneness appears to be a discourse on attributes without a noun. It is an empty debate that, on the other hand, does not even know what term it goes towards: it does not know its own meaning, but it knows it can have one; it tends towards a meaning even if it does not know which. After all, every serious research finds itself in this exact situation. Philosophy – like religion, art and every other serious discipline – should constantly remind people that questions are not means to get answers. On the contrary, answers are only means for an always new

[121] Cf. F. NIETZSCHE, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, in IDEM, *Werke in drei Bänden*, hg. von K. Schlechta, Bd. 2., p. 623.

[122] M. SERRES, *Genèse*, Grasset, Paris 1985, p. 84; Eng. trans. by Geneviève James and James Nielson, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1997, pp. 47f.

and rich development of the question: one should look for the meaning within the question and not in the answer.

Even Kant's famous questions (What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope?) that, in *Logik Jäsche*,[123] are summarized as "What is man?" remain indeed questions. Kant's transcendental study gives them foundation and therefore legitimization, but it does not answer them. Thanks to this study, one knows with rational certainty that (and under what conditions) one can know, ought to act and may hope. Therefore, one also knows if and under what conditions man is something and has a meaning. Contents, however, must be produced by metaphysical specifics and the sciences deriving therefrom. This task must be accomplished historically and is thus conditioned by cultural contingencies. The main meaning of research, therefore, lies in the question and only in it: answers can continuingly result from the question in ever-new forms only because the latter has and keeps its own meaning. As Cohen wisely noted in *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis,*[124] the great originality of Socrates's concept and its meaning is not the answer to the question *τί ἐστι*, but the question itself.

At this point, I must dwell on why it is more appropriate to talk of "attributes" rather than "virtues." After all, as we shall see, the contents of the human are a set of virtuous attitudes opposed to non-virtuous ones, and several philosophers have spoken of "humaneness" as a virtue. One of these philosophers was Hermann Cohen,[125] who greatly inspired me in the following considerations.

Humaneness is unquestionably a virtue, or rather a set of virtues. However, it is also a rule of temperament that applies to every other virtue: an interpretative parameter without which all other virtues would paradoxically risk becoming immoral. The famous maxim of Roman law "summum ius summa iniuria" can also be applied to every moral virtue whose meaning could be perverted if humaneness did not temper its interpretation and application. This sense of humaneness is subordinated to the other virtues. However, it also implies a superordinate meaning, since this humaneness presents itself as the regulative principle ruling and according all virtues and as a guideline more primal than morality and its principles. Kant's famous categorical imperative "So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means"[126] has several meanings. Among them, I think one should also find this regulative principle of morality. Such a regulatory sense must also be recognized in

[123] I. KANT, *Logik*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 9., p. 25.

[124] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1902, 1914[2]; this last edition was reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey, Georg Olms, Hildesheim-New York, Bd. 6, 1977, p. 378.

[125] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1904, 1907[2]; this last edition was reprinted in IDEM, *Werke*, cit., Bd. 7., 1981, cap. XVI: *Die Humanität*, pp. 617ff.

[126] I. KANT, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 4., p. 429; Eng. trans. by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-New York 2012, p. XXV.

Terence's maxim that I mentioned above "Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto" and in its possible complementary maxim "Omne inhumanum a me alienum puto."

Therefore, humaneness is also a virtue or a set of virtues; however, it does not identify itself with one specific virtue. It is part of morality, but it is also prior and successive to it. It lies within morality, but it also lies above, below and around it: it is the regulative horizon, the criterion for the discernment and the rule of temperament of all moral virtues. As Cohen writes: "Humaneness controls the other virtues, it is the core of all virtues and thus the supreme reference point of all creations, of all ideals and of ethics."[127] Later, Cohen notes: "The idea of harmony (...) is the limit of ethics. Humaneness is an originary human feeling, not a judgement on the value of man (...). What would all these virtues be if they could not confidently embrace this originary admonition? Humaneness harmonizes man's ethics; of course, this requires the ethical work, the exercise of judgement – to think otherwise would be a wrong illusion. Yet, it confirms the idea that this harmony could develop into a strong determination, so that the moral reflection would not have to be called into question every time."[128] This complex statute is peculiar to humaneness rather than morality. It simultaneously transforms humaneness in a parameter of morality, an element of it and a rule of interpretation and implementation of its principles. Thus, Cohen's apparent paradox of the relationship between justice and law can be transferred on this level. Cohen stated elsewhere that justice does not concern the legal principle, but only its demonstration: "The specific concept makes it logically necessary for the positive principle to recognize justice as its own completion, as completion of the law, and therefore as a kind of law itself. This should not happen because of its general principles but so as to administrate justice and therefore provide the demonstrations guiding the verification of the law. The necessity of both a completion of the law and, at the same time, of a law itself is no longer contradictory; completion, in fact, does not concern the legal principle – as if it should improve and correct it – but merely the legal demonstration."[129] A little later, however, he writes that through fairness "both the legal demonstration and the legal principle are faced with new criticism."[130] If one compares them directly, these two passages seem incompatible, also in relation to the relationship between humaneness and morality. However, if one takes into consideration the peculiarity of humaneness in relation to ethics, one realizes that this incompatibility is only apparent. As I said earlier, this is at the same time a virtue, the principle that tempers the application of any other virtue, and the regulatory criterion, prior to morality, that directs and coordinates all principles and their applications.

For this reason, I think one could say that humaneness is the "regulative transcendental" of morality. There is no doubt, in fact, that this transcendental horizon belongs to ethics. However, it does not identify itself with morality or one of its

[127] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., p. 628.

[128] *Ibid*., p. 633.

[129] *Ibid*., p. 620.

[130] *Ibid*., p. 622.

elements. It is a transcendental because it is prior to all morality. However, it is not an ontological or epistemological transcendental that could constitute the foundation of morality, but rather a regulative transcendental providing the general orientation and a harmonious and systematic condition for any genuine morality. I will return later to the important question of whether and how this regulative ideal implies a form of teleology.

To investigate the peculiar contents of the human, one cannot rely on a philosophical deduction because, as has been said, one does not have a transcendental founding principle, but only a regulative transcendental idea to guide one's thought of what is or is not human. This idea, anyhow, cannot produce deductive knowledge. However, one can rely on common sense, since everyone can recognize very well what is human and what is nonhuman in one's personal, social and political experiences. Philosophical reflection can and must account for these notions that derive from common sense, but it will have to rely on the latter so as to discover them. To trust common sense – understood as the Kantian "need for reason," that is, as "healthy reason" – is philosophically licit and necessary to guide one's thinking. Contrary to Deleuze's view, this trust can be reconciled with (or better, is peculiar to) the non-representational thinking outlined in Kant's and Cohen's critical idealism. Since I have already argued for these statements, I can here assume, without further justification, the philosophical legitimacy of this recourse to common sense as a rational prerequisite for philosophical thought.[131] It is necessary to say once again that this rational prerequisite cannot be a theoretical knowledge but is rather postulated by practical knowledge as well as by the regulative and indicative idea of thought as a whole. The primacy of practical reason implies the regulative primacy of practical ideas over reason in general and therefore, with regard to humanism here discussed, the primarily (though not exclusively) practical meaning of the regulative idea of the human.

Here I do not intend to provide a systematic and comprehensive perspective on human attributes, as this would involve extensive and careful anthropological researches addressing different cultures in a diachronic and synchronic way. I only want to envisage some more obvious elements of what is commonly perceived as the inalienable meaning of the human so as to contribute to a more comprehensive reflection that could be accomplished by others or me in the future.

A first essential and peculiar feature of humaneness is fairness. In *Ethik des Willens reinen*,[132] Cohen analyses the meaning of humaneness (*Humanität)* starting from the concept of fairness. He deeply and radically examines its meaning so as to overcome its strictly legal sense and bring out its fundamental ethical value. In order to do so, he starts from the meaning of *aequitas* in the Roman law, as a rule required by legal judgement and without which the universal principle of justice cannot be correctly implemented. Cohen, however, expands the meaning of fairness from the strictly legal sphere, so as to bring out its general ethical value. In fact, the issue of a fair judgement is a particular legal declination of the more general problem of an

[131] Cf. Theme I, Cadenza 4.

[132] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., pp. 617ff.

ethical judgment: that is, the universality of the principle of justice applied to the specific real case that – in ethics, unlike natural science – is not only the particular case, but also the single individual person, in the inexhaustible and impervious uniqueness of her existential reality. Cohen writes: "*Justice is the virtue of the ideal*. It is in its great superiority that its limit lies. Justice only looks to the ideal; it solely tends towards it. This means two things. First of all, it reveals that among all virtues, justice is the most difficult to actualize; it is that which, concretely, remains the most distant from the ideal. However, the difficulties of a full actualization are not the only element making the development of virtues seem backwards; this exclusive direction toward the ideal entails another difficulty.

When faced with the ideal, *reality itself* – with its specific traits – loses value and therefore interest in the virtue of the ideal. When one nurtures and protects any particular interest in reality, the idealistic interest in ethics, which comes with justice, appears to be in danger, blurred. The ideal seems, thus, to be repressed. Nevertheless, *the specific concrete case* requires evaluation, treatment, to which judgement itself does not appear to be able to do justice."[133]

As I have already said, however, the specific case, in the implementation of justice – unlike in natural sciences – is not the mere individual case but the *single* individual human being.[134] Therefore, it can neither be subject to an indefinitely correctable induction,[135] nor can it be considered as a gap in the law that can be filled by corrective actions such as mitigating circumstances[136]: "The specific concepts (...) are instead determinations of the universal problem of the particular that are strictly necessary for each case. *Without this specific, there would be no legal demonstration*."[137]

Furthermore, another aspect of primary importance requires relating justice to fairness and makes the latter a necessary rule for both the law and ethics as a whole: the difference between theory and practice. Certainly, ethicality as a whole has a theoretical aspect without which its validity, objectivity and universality would fail. This aspect manifests itself in the field of justice and judgment. On the other hand, though, ethicality also has a fundamental practical aspect that neither can nor should be brought back and reduced to the mere judgment. Cohen writes: "Justice, as the virtue of the law and the State, is indeed the ultimate virtue. But it wants to, and can, be such only because it is founded and built on a theoretical virtue, that is, on legal science and its practical application. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge a degree of unilaterality in all of this, as well as the fact that the greatest quality is counterbalanced by a fault. The entire procedure of justice is based on *judgement*. The certainty and transparency of the judicial administration and of the authority of the State are based on this theoretical foundation. And yet, ethics cannot only refer to this foundation, even though it always has to look to it. It has to expand its basis

[133] *Ibid*., p. 617.

[134] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 619.

[135] Cf. *ibidem*.

[136] Cf. *ibid*., p. 620.

[137] *Ibid*., pp. 620f.

by equally basing itself on another foundation. *The difference between theory and practice* presents itself in a particular way. Here, one can glimpse the idea (...) that the relationships between people must not only and exclusively rely on judgement, even if it were or could be the most just one.

Is the right path indicated by virtue – so that I have to treat every man according to his value and judge him accordingly – the only way? Hamlet not only posed the question in a correct and sharp way, but he also gave the positive answer, deeply rooted in the principle of ethics: I must *treat* everyone according to my own value. Men should not be treated according to our judgement of their value, but only according to the principle of ethics, that of moral self-consciousness. My own value lies in my moral self-consciousness. The ethical relationship must not be nurtured only based on our ethical judgment of the Other: in any case, and at best, this would only be a legal judgement. *Treatment must be separated in principle from the single judgement*. A new virtue thus arises.

A virtue that is necessary, because even if fairness were superfluous for the law, private human relationships would still have to find a virtue marked by the fundamental independence from the judgment of these relationships, *by a will and action that tend towards a relationship excluding judgement*. This is the new problem that makes a new virtue necessary."[138]

This new virtue that Cohen talks about, in fact, is not one of the many virtues but the regulative principle of all of them: the principle of temperament of the unilaterality of every virtue, the horizon of harmony between all virtues and thereby the fulfilment of the ethical ideal – indeed, it is humaneness (*Humanität*). Cohen continues: "The idea underlying Aristotle's ethics – that every virtue *lies somewhere between two extremes* – can help one orient oneself. In this idea lies the deeply human awareness that every virtue, any virtue, necessarily has a degree of *unilaterality*. If every single virtue is somehow unilateral, does the concept of virtue then loose its unilaterality through the sum of all virtues? Five or six unilateralities can, at most, weaken unilaterality, but not eliminate it. There is *only one* way to do this, that is, to introduce a virtue whose sole purpose is to eliminate it, or whose specific meaning is this: *this unilaterality of all virtues, or better, of the concept of virtue, must be the object of ethical consciousness, and therefore of self-consciousness*.

Unilaterality can be corrected, and therefore be no longer uncritically overrated, only through this self-consciousness. One must tend to limit the pedantic perspective on virtues, but one must also try to free oneself from this limit. Only thus does ethical self-consciousness find room again; it becomes the *determinative principle* for man's real task. For this task is not to judge the Other, but mostly and solely to treat him and act ethically in relation to him.

What should we call this new virtue? It is clear where to look for the answer: it lies in the *difference between treating and judging*."[139]

Humaneness is this way of "acting ethically" when "treating the Other." As I said, it is also a virtue but it is not reduced to it. Humaneness has a broader horizon

[138] *Ibid*., pp. 622f.

[139] *Ibid*., pp. 623f.

than morality, it prescinds from the moral judgment of the other; it is a fundamental ethical attitude towards the other that is not determined by the judgment on good and evil – it is a general disposition for the positive recognition of other, a favourable disposition for every human being and for all things human. This disposition, which is broader and more originary than morality itself and which orients it, joins duty and feeling. This was Schiller's ideal that gave rise to a debate between him and Kant. But this regulative idea of unity between duty and feeling is present in Kant as well. Think, for example, of his concept of "practical love," which certainly is not a pathological feeling but that can be taken as a tendency to "practice gladly"[140] one's duties towards God and one's neighbour.[141]

Cohen clearly highlights this important aspect of humaneness and introduces its meaning by recalling one of the characteristic attributes of the Renaissance humanist conception: courtesy. He writes: "If behaving like men can replace love, it can also make *goodness* superfluous (...).

If one must do without goodness, what it means to be human must be clarified in more detail. *Courtesy* (*Freundlichkeit*) seems to be a very clear concept. It is not simple goodness, it does not need to presume much; it is not love, it does not even contain this ambiguity. But it is not *friendship* (*Freundschaft*) either. For as much as it originates from loyalty and grows in it, it derives from choice and favour. Courtesy does not know the anxiety of choice, not even that between one person and another. The feelings of honour and love merge in it. *Man's face* is what shines in courtesy; in this face, courtesy can be grasped even in the shadows of its negation. The *courtesy of human feeling* shines from the inside; it can be intimidated or blurred, but it remains man's originary light, which can only vanish with his breath. Courtesy is the light of human nature."[142]

Here one could reopen a great debate that has interested philosophy for centuries: the relationship between ethical action and feeling – that is, more generally, the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. This theme is so broad and important that I cannot talk about it in just a few lines. I can only refer to the many various elaborations that have been developed throughout the entire history of philosophy. However, I mention it here so as to emphasize that the theme of humaneness is a privileged standpoint for this problem, since the ethical and the aesthetical dimensions converge within humaneness in a unity that cannot be easily determined. Cohen himself noticed this limit of humaneness between ethics and aesthetics.[143] He

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[140] Cf. I. KANT, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 5., p. 83; Eng. trans. M. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 71.

[141] On this theme, cf. my *Il comando dell'amore del prossimo nell'etica di Kant: morale e storia*, in AA.VV., *Kant e la morale. A duecento anni da "La metafisica dei costumi." Convegno della Società Italiana di Studi Kantiani* [Biblioteca di "Studi Kantiani" n.8], Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, Pisa-Roma 1999, pp. 69–92.

[142] H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., pp. 626s.; I translate "*Freundlichkeit*" as "courtesy," because I want to highlight the reference to Renaissance humanism.

[143] Cf. *ibid*., pp. 633ff.

writes, among other things, that humaneness "lies, so to speak, at the limits of ethics and art; it is the *trail sign of both paths* that run parallel for a long stretch."[144]

However, it is important to bear in mind that, on the one hand, will and feeling merge into humaneness but, on the other hand, feeling as a human character is never simply pathological, emotional or instinctual. These two reasons have led "benevolence" to be the main characterization of "humaneness." Going back to the meaning of the Greek *φιλανθρωπία*, the Roman humanism found in the Circle of Scipio, Cicero and especially Seneca recognizes "*benevolentia*" as the main feature of "*humanitas*." Benevolence is certainly understood as a feeling, as a special meaning of love that, however, is different from the purely pathological inclination and has an essential moral quality. In fact, scholastic philosophy distinguished the "*amor concupiscientiae*" from the "*amor benevolentiae*." Unlike the former, the latter is a disinterested love that rejoices for other people's happiness and suffers for other people's unhappiness. A synonym of benevolence is "tenderness." This should not be intended as an emotion, but as the disposition to rejoice and suffer for other people's good or evil.[145]

The important attribute of benevolence, therefore, involves the disposition to participate in the human suffering of both the individual and mankind as a whole. But it also involves the disposition to participate in other people's joy. More generally, benevolence makes someone willing to participate, at the level of feeling, in whatever is human. This participation is not only a reflection of feeling, but also an attitude of ethical solidarity towards one's own humaneness as well as other people's.

This set of meanings of the human attribute is radically opposed to the inhuman – that is, envy, jealousy, resentment and cruelty. It goes up to removing the very possibility of hatred not only on a personal level, but also on the social and political ones. In fact, the very possibility to consider other people as "enemies" – and thus the possibility to hate them – is removed from humaneness. In *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, Cohen develops this extreme thesis with the utmost radicalism. He writes: "The Talmud has discovered the concept of 'wanton hatred' (*sin 'at chinnam*) and introduced it into the prayers. Not only should hatred not have a false cause, but it has no cause at all. Any cause for hatred is empty and vain. Hatred is always wanton hatred. This is the deep wisdom which excels all love of the enemy and which first secures and psychologically strengthens human love. It is not enough that I recognize that I ought to love my enemy – apart from the fundamental question of whether both concepts are compatible. I can remove hatred from the human heart only insofar as I do not know any enemy at all; the information and the knowledge that a man is my enemy, that he hates me, must be as incomprehensible to me as that I myself could hate a man, and therefore it must drop out of my consciousness. The one must become as unintelligible to me as the other. People

[144] *Ibid*., p. 635.

[145] For an analysis of these themes in Leibniz, who loyally abide by the tradition, cf. *Impossibilità e necessità della teodicea. Gli "Essais" di Leibniz*, Mursia, Milano 1995, chap. I, § 4, pp. 40ff.; Eng. trans. by Alice Spencer, Springer, Dordrecht 2013, pp. 34ff.

persuade themselves that they hate one another, but this is their delusion, the fateful outcome of their ignorance about their own soul and their consciousness. The vanity which Koheleth ascribes to everything is in this case related to hatred, and this vanity is expressed by a word which means futile, and that which is in vain. All hatred is in vain. I deny hatred to the human heart. Therefore I deny that I have an enemy, that a man could hate me. I deny this with the same clarity of my consciousness with which I deny that I have an enemy, that I could hate a man. What is hatred? I deny its possibility. The word, which intends to describe such a concept, is altogether empty."[146]

These human attributes and, most of all, the radical denial of hatred are clearly ideal guidelines, almost provocatively counterfactual but not necessarily utopian. They are rather regulative ideas, infinite tasks that do not trade their future exemplary nature with a present inconsistency – in fact, these ideas are concrete paradigms for the necessary critical judgment of the present and, above all, programmes for the culture and education of individuals and communities. At its origins and throughout its historical development, the humanist ideal always entailed a cultural education program. The Greek *παιδεία*, the Roman *humanitas* and the *studia humanitatis* of modern humanism were an integral and important part of humanism. So, today's proposal of a new humanism cannot be presented without a cultural education program. One could say that humanism itself (unlike other perspectives) is always safe from the utopian alibi. The reason is that humanism, as has been outlined here, is anti-dogmatic: it neither owns nor believes to own a definite and definitive idea of its purpose. It can only point in one direction: not a noun to be achieved at all costs, but only attributes through which it can find, each time, its own meaning. Another reason is that humanism itself is the antidote for every illusion of perfection: in fact, it is benevolence towards whatever is human and, first of all, toward the weakness, fragility, incompleteness, vulnerability, and imperfection of the human and therefore of all its realisations.

For this reason, even the ultimate horizon of humanism – peace, that is, the accomplished harmony of all unilateralities, including those of moral virtues – despite being the ultimate ideal, comprehensive of all human attributes, neither can nor should be thought of or pursued in a maximalist and utopian way. It should rather be taken as a regulative ideal whose completeness can never be the result of man's work, but is the transcendent horizon of an infinite tension – man's *Sehnsucht* towards what is only present as absence.

This is why Cohen develops the theme of peace (which, even in his work on ethics,[147] he mentions as an integral meaning of humaneness) only from a religious point of view.[148] Man's fundamental and inexhaustible task is to yearn for peace. To

[146] H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, hg. von Benzion Kellermann, Fock, Leipzig 1919; hg. von Bruno Strauss, J. Kaufmann, Frankfurt a.M. 1929; repr. J. Melzer, Köln 1959, p. 522; Eng. trans. S. Kaplan, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., New York 1972, p. 452.

[147] Cf. H. COHEN, *System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens*, cit., pp. 631f.

[148] Cf. H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, cit., pp. 515ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 446ff.

obtain peace, instead, is a messianic expectation that only openness to divine transcendence can transform into hope and faith.

These considerations are clearly out-dated in postmodern culture, understood both as realized capitalism and as the questionable and challenging programmes of Nietzschean inspiration. However, even in postmodern culture there is room for other paths and attempts to elaborate a culture that, inspired by humanism, may be a culture of peace. I quote once again Michel Serres' reflection[149] as an example of this possibility. I believe that, while being faithful to the essential conditions of postmodern culture, one can develop the humanistic ideal of peace even in a humanism open to transcendence – one in which man's *Sehnsucht*, expressing an a completely autonomous attribute of his humaneness, can and must find a reason to hope in the transition to religion.

To propose humanism in today's culture, one has to deal with the conditions that generally characterize postmodern society and culture, both in its dominant expression (realized capitalism), and in its alternative expressions. Here, I will only take into consideration two essential characters of postmodern culture that I think are particularly important for a revival of humanism: the dissolution of the subject and the rejection of teleology.

Postmodern culture is characterized not so much by deconstructing the subject – as the anti-modern has already accomplished this unmasking – but rather by acknowledging the dissolved and broken subject. The capitalist society is an anonymous system of flows and disruption of flows, in which subjects are at best ephemeral intersections of always-interchangeable trajectories lacking any permanence or identity and deprived of any power to decide and significantly act on events. This consideration might seem to be contradicted by the widespread individualism that characterizes contemporary society, but it is not so. Individualism is undoubtedly the mentality and general custom of our society. It is also the most prevalent ideology of our culture, as shown by the undiscussed prevalence of utilitarianism and its many forms in the panorama of contemporary ethical theories.[150] This prevalence of individualism and of the ideologies theorizing it, such as utilitarianism or ethics of rights, have a fundamental influence both on the social and political choices of our society (i.e.: the law-making process, the organization of political consensus, the deliberation on individual and collective ethical problems) and on economic problems such as the distribution of wealth and the investment of resources. The ideological monopoly of individualism is so solid that no ethical or economic debate can overcome it. Also, any attempt to question it is hardly taken into account, since it is marked by a negative bias from the very beginning.

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[149] Cf. M. SERRES, *Rome. Le livre des fondations*, Grasset, Paris 1983; Eng. trans. by R. Burks, Bloomsbury, London-New Delhi-New York-Sidney Academic, 2015; cf. also Theme III, Cadenza 3.

[150] Utilitarianism may not seem an individualistic ideology at all, as it is inspired by the fundamental principle of the utmost good for the most, that is, a principle of global – rather than individual – maximization. However, one must also realize that such a global maximisation is always considered as the result of the sum of individual profits.

There is no doubt that establishing and claiming the individual's ethical, social, economic and political importance has fundamentally helped the growth of Western culture and is an inalienable legacy of it. Other cultures have not gained an equally keen awareness of man's individual dimension. The importance and dignity of people as individuals are the basis of the ideals of freedom and equality that, in the modern age, have led Western societies to free themselves from despotism. However, claiming the dignity of the human being as an individual does not mean reducing her to this single dimension. It is one thing to affirm that the ethical, social, economic and political dimension of the subject is important, but to identify the concept of subject with the concept of individual – that is, to reduce the subject to the individual – is something else entirely: the subject is the individual, the individual is the subject. Challenging the prevailing individualism, therefore, does not mean devaluating the inalienable awareness of how important the subject's individual dimension is, but rather refusing to reduce the subject's meaning to this single dimension.

However, the prevailing individualism of our society and culture would seem to manifest a strong and solid conception of the subject's identity and therefore to reject the dissolved and broken subject as the characteristic of postmodern culture. But this is only an appearance that can be easily overcome by considering the radically changed meaning of the subject as an individual in the postmodern culture compared to the modern.

The individual's social, legal and political dignity was acknowledged for the first time in the modern era starting from the seventieth century, and originating in the liberal ideology and therefore in the liberal economic theories. It is no coincidence that for a long time, the individual's social, legal and political dignity has been linked to her status as owner. This awareness is the basis of important developments in modern political history such as the emergence of contractualism, of natural law and of the realization of the great liberal revolutions.

According to this conception, the individual subject was the only true protagonist of social and political life. Therefore, he did not have only an authentic sovereignty, along and at par with all the other individuals, but also rights and duties. As per the modern legal and political concept of the individual, this correspondence between rights and duties defined his very identity. If one then looks at the conception of the individual in today's capitalist society, one can easily recognize that its meaning has essentially shifted and consequently modified the individual's existential status and reason for recognition. The postmodern individual is solely a bearer of rights – not of duties. She recognizes her desires, instincts and aspirations and she demands that the entire society recognizes and respects them as well. The individuating principle is no longer economic interest and ownership, but the eudaimonistic principle of pleasure, happiness or utility. Modern individualism could be called *individualism of ownership* and postmodern individualism could be called *individualism of desire*. The individual, therefore, believes to have an unlimited and justified right to satisfy her desires. She claims this right without needing it to be founded on nothing but desire itself. One could mention many clear manifestations of this mentality in the current custom: the right to parenthood, to euthanasia, to drug use, and so on. These are just a few examples. The concept of right, therefore, loses its legal meaning and

is no longer complementary to the notion of duty: it becomes a mere claim of desire. But who represents this desiring individual in our society? Who is this individual claiming to be justified by desire itself to satisfy her desire? Clearly, she is the "consumer." In the society of realized capitalism, however, the consumer is not the subject but the object of the trading system; the latter persuades her to act so as to keep the trades going. Therefore, the postmodern individual is not a subject but an object, and her apparently solid identity is in fact only a resource that the trading system can change and modify whenever it wants.

Now that the possible objection of individualism has been addressed, I can return to the problem of whether a humanist project can or cannot be proposed in the postmodern culture of the broken subject.

The identity of the subject, the consistency of his experiences and behaviour, the unification of his intentions and features into a solid "character," have certainly been important to all the fields of Western culture: gnoseology, psychology, ethics, art, society, pedagogy, politics. However, they have also been absolutized and perverted – especially with the decline of the bourgeois culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which deprived them of their original meaning and turned them into appearances that are often hypocritical and inhumane. For this reason, the anti-modern criticism vigorously tried to unmask and destroy these illusions, now false and misleading. Therefore, we are unquestionably lucky to be able to live, think, and act in a postmodern culture, as free from any reductionist and oppressive illusion of a subject that is falsely identical to himself and hypocritically controlled by a consciousness resulting from a self-judgement affected by narcissism and self-referentiality. Since I have discussed this theme earlier, I will here limit myself to a few comments on the problem taken into examination: whether and how it is possible to propose humanism in the culture of the dissolved and broken subject.

As I said, the illusion of an identical and harmonious subject, coherent in his life experiences and bound to a moral behaviour that is univocal and safe from uncertainty, has definitely disappeared. However, this does not mean that the many-centuried ideal of the individual's unity inclined to fully realize his meaning and sense potentialities has lost its value as well. One must simply recognize that one neither can nor should delude oneself that this ideal is either the clear and certain outcome of a project or an already realized possession. The subject is aware of her dispersion: she recognizes the differences not only in interpersonal and social relationships, but also as a constitutive part of her own subjectivity. She also recognizes that her multiple and aleatory experiences and actions are not a negative dissipation but, on the contrary, a wealth and variety that positively create her. As a consequence, the subject not only rejects any illusion of possessing an identity that is or can be accomplished, but she also refuses to predetermine the purpose and final destination of this distracted wandering. The broken and nomadic subject wanders without a particular purpose, without a definite form to pursue; but she is always looking for something, even if she does not know what. In other contexts, I have called this search ("*ricercare*", especially in its musical meaning) for what is not there "lyrical *Sehnsucht*," the presence of absence that guides the lover towards the beloved. Man is loyal to himself and his own truth; however, he does not reductively

select his own experiences and intentions in the name of an identity that does not exist and that he can neither see nor construct. He rather experiences his fully desired condition of a wayfarer by following all the paths that promise a sense, conscious of their inconsistent multiplicity, but also longing for his harmonic form that is always and solely present to him as mere absence.

I am here trying to demonstrate that this human situation is not incompatible with a humanistic proposal, but is rather a necessary condition for it. If, as we have seen, one rejects any idea of humanism founded on an *a priori* particular definition of man and regards humanism as pursuit of human attributes; if the only prerequisite for this research is the freedom of our choices, that is, indeterminacy, determinability and the ability of self-determination, without knowing or having any guarantee of where freedom leads; if, on the other hand, these attributes of the human are like stars that can be reliably followed for orientation, a regulative transcendental that allows one to trace what is absent; then the humanism of the attributes that I am proposing here does not exclude this broken and nomadic subject but specifically recognizes him as the sole true protagonist of the research proposed in it. This should be understood in a constitutive sense and not only as a momentary condition. The subject wanders without a destination, gets lost in paths that never meet, has a broken heart and makes aleatory experiences not only so as to reach, after a short time, the blinding light of certainty and identity: this, in fact, is his permanent condition, a modality of his being. Borrowing Pico della Mirandola's words, these things constitute the permanent condition of the "chameleon," the "Proteus" that we are.[151] As I have said above,[152] the question "What is man?" is not a means to find an answer as soon as possible, but rather is itself the path, or rather the ever-changing multiplicity of paths, which man experiences *in fieri,* in an undefined and never fulfilled way. The *Sehnsucht* of the form, and therefore of his own form, drives him towards a horizon that keeps changing, because one's experiences, choices and actions are able to move it *plus ultra*. Only religious faith allows one to transform this *Sehnsucht* – which itself is valid and meaningful – into trust and hope. This is not a hope to achieve the purpose, but a praying hope that the absent may be present and give man the form he produces in his wandering. Psalm 51 (v. 19b) describes the condition of man in a realistic way: "A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" and entrusts to the prayerful hope its fulfilment: "Create in me a pure heart, O God" (v. 12a).

The elements necessary to address the issue of teleology, that is, of history, are already present in what I have said so far. As is known, in his 1979 book *La condition postmoderne*, Jean- François Lyotard emphasized the end of the great narratives that guided the modern era. Many other authors – following or contemporary to him – have recognized this undeniable fact as an important condition of postmodernity. The disenchanted postmodern man can no longer believe in a necessary or certain teleology that guides the sense of history towards its purpose or inescapable destiny – be it the realization of the spirit, of the idea or of science. The end of teleology,

[151] Cf. *supra*, p. 223.

[152] Cf. *supra*, p. 225.

in any form, seems to entail the end of history as well. This is relevant to the theme of humanism, because if we are to acknowledge the end of general teleology, we should do the same with Husserl's narrative of a history that tends to realize humaneness as destiny, as an "inborn" "entelechy" immanent to the development of the European – that is, human – spirit "toward which, in concealment, the whole spiritual becoming aims."[153]

But one must ask oneself whether the end of teleology as a metaphysical principle, the *a priori* foundation of the development of humaneness towards its necessary purpose, implies the end of history as well. In fact, if one rejects the illusion of a teleological destiny that guides human events to a safe end, one is not necessarily obliged to believe that the chaos of brute facts and the absolute lack of sense of the human events are all that is left. This, on the other hand, would mean accepting an absolute alternative to the historical one, which is blind and anonymous: an omnipotent nature in which human events would be merely irrelevant and microscopic phenomena, absorbed in the obtuse magma of becoming. Such a perspective is not absent from postmodern culture. Rather, it inevitably and regrettably derives from an influential technological mentality that eliminates any projectuality or hope, blinded by the superstitious belief in the unavoidability of the so-called technological progress, seen as the blind fate of a veritable "second nature."

Trying to approach postmodern culture and the end of modern teleology more attentively, one must first of all notice that today (as always), people tell stories, and that they are such because they have a meaning. Men have always told stories: stories of things that happened, either enacted or undergone by people – events determined or conditioned by their free choices, or facts they passively experienced. But in order to become narrative stories, they always had to be experienced, interpreted and presented as manifestations of meaning. Of course, the meaning of a story is not necessarily a moral lesson, unlike what posited the harvesters of fairy tales in the eighteenth century, who – tied to a clearly too narrow perspective – used to revisit old and legendary stories by adding an awkward moral to them so as to abide by the safe schemes of the generally shared view. However, the fact remains that a meaningless story can simply not be told. Its meaning is certainly open and changes constantly, resulting from the multiple and various intentions of those who tell the experience, those who hear it and repeat it, and the indefinite community of those who hear it. The powerful truth of stories is not weakened but rather strengthened by this continuous enrichment of their meaning.

Therefore, *stories* certainly have a meaning that, in order to exist and be passed on, must not necessarily be brought back to one universal an necessary meaning of *history*. The awareness that one must – but also thankfully can – tell multiple and different (certainly not eternal but rather variable and evanescent) stories with all their rich differences, without therefore reducing them to the abstract identity of a predetermined meaning, is an undoubtedly positive aspect of postmodern culture.

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[153] Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, cit., pp. 320f.; Eng. trans. cit., p. 275.

The radical freedom of man, who produces his own sense through his infinite stories, is not preordained to any univocal and guaranteed meaning. History thus results in the multiple and different stories told, and each one of them carries a sense in itself.

This idea, however, would paradoxically result in the indifference of meaning and, therefore, in the chaos of the "second nature," lacking some criterion to guide the narratives of stories and to select them according to their meaning. What organizes the narratives is not a determining principle organizing narratives in a predefined system but, even in this case, a regulative idea selecting the stories within memory and tradition. This regulative idea is precisely the idea of humaneness, not intended as a substantive determination, but as the set of human and inhuman attributes. The stories we experience and hand down narrate the human and inhuman: for this reason, they are interesting and continuously re-told.

In this way, stories are handed down in their multiplicity and differences. They are not a solid and monolithic progress towards a goal. Rather, each one of them hands down its own meaning in a network of independent narratives that sometimes meet and cross, join or overlap. The regulative horizon of humaneness is nothing more than the *Sehnsucht* of a common form: the human present in all of them as the element tracked by the narration. Religious faith is the only thing that allows man to hope and trust that these various, fleeting and countless stories will find unity and stability in God's heart and that, one day, they will be also revealed to human beings. But whether this optimistic hope is present or not, the stories constantly told by men produce their own meaning and, at the same time, form the storytellers and listeners in the direction indicated by all these productions of meaning.

If the regulative horizon of these stories is the *Sehnsucht* of their common form – humaneness – the condition of their credibility is humour. That is, the stories must narrate the multiple events of the human in a plausible way. Therefore, those who tell a story, as well as those who hear it, must be able to glimpse, in the poor and perishable events narrated, the actual (real and effective) presence of the human that was produced by them, albeit in a defective and uncertain way. As Serres says, in his universal meaning man "is empty and blank."[154] This blank, however, is not absence but rather an undifferentiated fullness of all colours. One can show this broken and refracted blank through the myriad of colourful stories that we tell – knowing, even without being able to see it, that the set of all possible stories makes up the blank that is man.

I have previously defined peace as the accomplished harmony of every unilaterality, that is, as what inspires the *Sehnsucht* of the human soul. However, I must also integrate this theme with the necessary complement of humour, that is, the ability to recognize, within the partial and imperfect realizations of the human, the actual presence of the ideal (absent in its completeness) and its ability to produce meaning and history. The sublime and humour are certainly both integral and complementary to humaneness. However, in a way humour takes priority in it, because without the

[154] M. SERRES, *Genèse*, Grasset, Paris 1985, p. 84; Eng. trans. by Geneviève James and James Nielson, The University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 47.

ability to see and appreciate benevolently – beyond judgment – the meaning of the human in the diverse and fleeting events and narratives of men, there would be no trace of the peace to which we aspire. With this attitude, instead, one can proceed in one's insecure and precarious wandering, sustained by the joy and consolation that the human already offers. In *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, Cohen wisely highlights the importance of this theme: "Considering the suffering that pervades the whole historical life of the Jew, it is surely a wonder that he could continually maintain such equanimity, such a genuine humor, without which he would never have been able to lift himself again and again from the deepest humiliations to proud heights. The Jewish holidays have brought about this wonder for him. On the Sabbath and on the feasts, joy governed the Ghetto no matter how much suffering had embittered the days of the week. Joy on a holiday was a religious duty, and hence it became an inviolable and vital power in the Jewish consciousness (...). As once Isaiah called, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye My people' [Isa. 40:1], so the peace of humor spread its wings over the people of the Ghetto."[155]

Thus, if one can no longer believe in a "history of humanity" that walks with confidence and assurance towards its objective, one can nevertheless experience and narrate in always new ways the "stories of humaneness," in which one's humaneness is actually produced, albeit in fragility and imperfection.

"And God said: 'Let us make man'." Why does the Lord God – the one and omnipotent – address himself with the plural form? Because the Lord God, once he moulded Adam from the dust and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, turned to him and said, "Adam, I have created you; now, if you want, you and I together will turn you into a man."

Ewig ... ewig ...

[155] H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, cit., pp. 529f.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 458f.

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