

УЈСЈВЛЕ **и** **ЈНУЈСЈВЛЕ**

Сумња рђјосорђјае **и** **антропољоџија**

**Мјчал Валјек**



# Contents

Sources and references . . . . .	iii
Some conventions . . . . .	iv
<b>I In the beginning ...</b>	<b>1</b>
1 there was Nothingness . . . . .	1
2 In the begining there was only Chaos, the Abyss . . . . .	5
2.1 Spatiality/simultaneity . . . . .	7
2.2 Distinction . . . . .	8
2.3 Signification . . . . .	12
3 In the beginning was Word . . . . .	12
3.1 Sign and recognition . . . . .	13
3.2 Actuality . . . . .	16
3.3 Awareness and self-awareness . . . . .	18
4 Reflection . . . . .	21
4.1 Representation . . . . .	23
4.2 Subject-object . . . . .	30
4.3 Time and space . . . . .	32
4.3.1. Time . . . . .	32
4.3.2. Space . . . . .	43
4.3.3. Objective or constituted? . . . . .	44
5 Reflection and Experience . . . . .	46
5.1 Actual and non-actual . . . . .	46
5.2 Some problems of reflection . . . . .	53
5.2.1. The original truth . . . . .	53
5.2.2. The objectivistic attitude, the subjectivistic illusion. . . . .	57
5.2.3. Antinomies of actuality . . . . .	59
5.2.4. Two modes of 'givenness' . . . . .	67
6 In a few long words... . . . . .	69
6.1 Separation . . . . .	69
6.2 One – not Many . . . . .	71
6.3 To be is to be distinguished . . . . .	73
6.3.1. Relativity and objectivity . . . . .	76
6.3.2. A note on Berkeley's idealism . . . . .	77
6.3.3. One is . . . . .	79
6.4 Virtuality . . . . .	88
6.4.1. Two kinds of causes . . . . .	88
6.4.2. What makes One differentiate? . . . . .	93
<b>II Between Heaven and Earth</b>	<b>101</b>
1 The existential levels . . . . .	101
1.1 Immediacy . . . . .	102
1.1.1. The signs . . . . .	102
1.1.2. Substances, objects, particulars . . . . .	104
1.1.3. Transcendence . . . . .	109
1.2 Actuality . . . . .	110
1.2.1. Complexes . . . . .	110

1.2.2. The signs . . . . .	111
1.2.3. Ego, body, action, control . . . . .	125
1.2.4. Transcendence . . . . .	128
1.3 Mineness . . . . .	130
1.3.1. The signs . . . . .	132
1.3.2. This world . . . . .	135
1.3.3. I . . . . .	136
1.3.4. Transcendence . . . . .	140
1.4 Invisibles . . . . .	142
1.4.1. The signs . . . . .	143
1.4.2. The invisibles . . . . .	148
1.4.3. Transcendence . . . . .	156
1.4.4. Self . . . . .	159
2 Above and below . . . . .	175
2.1 The hierarchy of levels . . . . .	175
2.2 As above, so below . . . . .	179
2.2.1. Presence and co-presence . . . . .	179
2.2.2. The ontological founding . . . . .	182
2.2.3. Traces . . . . .	184
2.3 As below, so above . . . . .	225
3 The origin of mathematics . . . . .	228
3.1 What is a point? . . . . .	229
3.2 Numbers – multiplicity of distinctions . . . . .	230
3.3 Infinity . . . . .	233
3.4 A note on foundations . . . . .	236
3.5 Summarising... . . . . .	238
<b>III Visible and Invisible</b>	<b>245</b>
1 Thirst . . . . .	246
1.1 The hermeneutics of thirst . . . . .	249
1.1.1. Search . . . . .	249
1.1.2. The circle of despair . . . . .	250
1.1.3. Saying No . . . . .	252
2 Spiritual choice of No . . . . .	256
2.1 Malum privativum . . . . .	257
2.2 Malum negativum . . . . .	260
2.3 Malum activum . . . . .	262
2.4 Impersonally personal . . . . .	266
2.5 Attachment . . . . .	272
3 Spiritual choice of Yes . . . . .	273
3.1 Being and knowing . . . . .	275
3.2 Yes . . . . .	283
3.2.1. Ratio Anselmi . . . . .	290
3.2.2. Reflective Yes . . . . .	292
3.3 Concrete founding . . . . .	298
3.3.1. Non-attachment . . . . .	300
3.3.2. Inversions . . . . .	306
3.3.3. Examples . . . . .	309
4 The analogues of God . . . . .	338
4.1 Proper names . . . . .	339
4.2 Names . . . . .	339
4.2.1. Godhead vs. God . . . . .	340
4.3 Two faces of the one . . . . .	342
4.3.1. Yes . . . . .	345
4.3.2. No . . . . .	350

## Sources and references

I quote rather extensively and from rather different traditions. However, I never go into exegesis of the texts or analysis of the thoughts of others. An attempt to do so would make finishing this work impossible. On few occasions I make more detailed statements in order to illustrate differences which also should clarify my meanings. The variety of sources and inspirations makes me even limit the quotations to the most succinct statements which, I think, express some essential idea. Although the basic rules of conscientious exegesis may be thus violated, and some quotations might have even been not only drawn out of their context but even adjusted to fit the present one, the intention is never to violate the meaning of the quoted text. (Besides, exegesis is not our objective.)

Variety of traditions suggests that we should focus on affinities and often even only vague similarities rather than differences and oppositions. Was St. Augustine entitled to claim the presence of Christian truths in the neo-Platonic texts, as he did in the much disputed and controverted passage in *Confessions* VII:9? Was St. Clement of Alexandria right in the similar claims of the affinity of the Greek philosophy and literature with the Christian revelation? Was Philo Judaeus right claiming not only the similarities between but even the direct dependence of Greek thought on the Biblical tradition? Scholars might prove that they were all wrong pointing out significant differences making the two views different and even incompatible. The Greek spirit was, after all, completely different from the Christian one. Perhaps, but this depends on how one draws the borders around the intuitions like ‘Greek spirit’ or ‘Christian spirit’. One can always find differences separating two views – the question is at what level, and then, what value one will attach to them as opposed to the similarities. (After all, the neo-Platonic culmination of Greek spirit, with its severe critiques of the emerging Christianity, provided the foundation for the depth of Christian mysticism.) Opposing, say, Greek spirit and Christian spirit, one should never forget that in both cases one is speaking about spirit which, incarnated in opposing socio-historical and political constellations, remains at the bottom human spirit. It takes some wisdom to recognise concrete unity behind actual differences and to stop distinguishing when everything worth saying has been said – the problem of perspicacious thoroughness, as La Rochefoucauld observed, is not that it does not reach the end but that it goes beyond it. We will for the most focus on the similarities and it is up to you to decide whether they are only due to the negligence in observing the important distinctions or, perhaps, they are justified because the possible distinctions are of negligible importance.

There are a few special sources which deserve a comment. The authorship of *My Sister and I* is the matter of dispute and scholars can not tell for sure (perhaps, rather seriously doubt) that it is indeed, as is also claimed, autobiography written by Nietzsche himself. The authorship of relevant thoughts should not be that important. However, in an academic context the issue may become a bit sensitive, especially when the claimed author is Nietzsche. (It might be so, in particular, if one wanted to relate the contents of this autobiography to his other works which, however, I am not doing.)

Even if it were not Nietzsche, it certainly could be, though the author might also have been more Nietzschean than Nietzsche himself. Facing the lack of any decisive proofs or disproofs of purely textual, linguistic or medical nature, we are left with the text which looks like it might have been written, if not carefully re-read and edited, by Nietzsche. The voice for or against his authorship depends then on one’s view of his thought – whether this text ‘fits’ into the image one has of his whole thinking and, not least, personality. For me, there is a perfect match with the image I had formed before I found this book. (Possible objections against the portrait arising from it, should be confronted with less extreme, yet by no means incompatible, impressions of the close friend in L. Salomé, *Nietzsche*.) “In the end, *My Sister and I* reminds me of a true story.”<sup>1</sup> Having made this reservation, I will quote the text as if Nietzsche was its author.

Another referenced text, hopefully of much less dubious value, is a collection of early Freiburg lectures by M. Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life* [*Phenomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 60]. Some of these have been reconstructed almost exclusively from the notes of the students. Thus the reader should be warned that the quoted formulations, although reflecting hopefully the intentions, are hardly Heidegger’s. (In any case, they are translated by me into English, and that mostly from the Polish translation of the German text. Well...)

---

<sup>1</sup> W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche and the Seven Sirens*.

Likewise, Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, is only reconstructed from the extensive fragments quoted and criticized in Origen, *Against Celsus*. In this case, however, the breadth and details of Origen's response give reasonable confidence into the authenticity of the reconstruction. Much worse is the case of Porphyry, *Against the Christians* where even the attribution of authorship may be disputed as the work is reconstructed mainly from the *Apocriticus* of Macarius Magnes which need not reflect the philosophy of Porphyry. These works are quoted as if they were written by the authors to whom they are attributed by the general (though not universal) scholarly opinion. For investigating the associated doubts and controversies the reader may start by consulting the referenced editions.

Two distinct editions of J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon* have been used. The critical edition (started by late I. P. Sheldon-Williams and continued by É. A. Jeauneau) of volumes I, II and IV is referenced as just done, with the number+letter identifying the page number and the manuscript as in the edition. Volumes III and V are from the abbreviated translation by M. L. Uhlfelder and are referenced to in the same way, J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, with only page numbers in this single volume edition. In either case, the volume number identifies uniquely the referenced edition.

\* \* \*

One encounters sometimes cases when, in an English text, quotations and longer passages are given in French, German or some other language of the original – sometimes even Latin or Greek. Although this may serve as an indication that the text is addressed to a particular audience, it is no more pleasing than any other form of intellectual snobbery. It is perhaps a good tone to know German, French, Italian, Latin and Greek, but few people do and I am not one of them. Since I have used extensively sources in other languages, I have attempted to access – and if I did not succeed then to translate – all the quotations into English. (A few exceptions concern passages of German poetry which I did not dare to attempt translating.) Sometimes, I ended thus translating back into English texts translated originally from English into another language in which I read them. Such cases are marked as ‘my retranslation...’. Hopefully, this will not cause any serious confusion – to fix it, I have to find some time with nothing better to do.

## Some conventions

All the works are referred by the English title, even if I used the source in another language; this is then indicated in the Bibliography at the end of the text. (A few exceptions are made when the original source is referred after another author, as is often the case with collected works or fragments.)

The references to all the works look uniformly as

Author, *Title XI:1.5...*

where the part before ‘:’, typically a Roman numeral, refers to the main part into which the source is divided (e.g., book, part, chapter), and the numerals after ‘:’ to the nested subparts. The references to the Bible have no ‘Source’, thus ‘Matt. X:5’ refers to *The Gospel of Matthew*, chapter X, verse 5. (I have used primarily King James Version and commented occasional usage of other translations in the footnotes.) Likewise, the references to pre-Socratics are usually given without any source by merely specifying the author and the Diels-Kranz number, e.g., ‘Heraclitus, DK 22B45’, where the number identifying the philosopher (here 22) is taken from the fifth edition of Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

Identifying quotations by page numbers might have been reasonable in times when most books existed only in one edition. I have tried to avoid such references but in a few cases, where the structuring and numbering of the text happens to be very poor, I had to use this form. This is also sometimes the case with the quotations borrowed from others which I did not verify (the source is then given in the square braces “[after...]” following the reference). The pagination follows then at the end of the reference as ‘Author, *Title XI:1.5...;p.21*’, where the numbers indicating part and subparts usually involve only the main part (i.e., only ‘XI;p.21’), and may be totally absent, if no such division of the work is given. The edition is identified in the Bibliography. Occasionally, the subparts may have a letter, as e.g., ‘II:d7.q1.a2’. These are only auxiliary and their meaning depends on the source. Typically, these are used with the medieval authors and the reference above might be to the distinction 7, question 1, answer 2, in the second, II, volume/book.

In few cases I do not know the origin of the quotation, or else I only (believe to) know its author. I chose to indicate such incomplete pieces of information, rather than skipping them all together. I have likewise indicated the use of unauthorized, or in any case unedited, versions of the texts found on the interned for which no bibliographical data except for the title and the author are given in the Bibliography. (For some, certainly very pragmatic reasons, books printed in the USA do not carry explicitly the year of publication but only the year of copyright. Consequently, the bibliographical information for such books refers usually to this date.)

\* \* \*

Words which are given some more specific, technical meaning are written with *slanted font*. “Quotation marks” are used for words and quotations. ‘Shudder-quotes’ indicate, typically, either the referent of the word in the quotes, or else a concept or expression which is not given a technical meaning in the text but which is borrowed from somewhere else or even is only assumed to have some technical sense. Thus, for instance:

- *subject* – is the subject in the technical sense introduced in the text;
- ‘*subject*’ – is subject in some, possibly technical sense of somebody else; it may often indicate a slight irony over only apparently precise meaning one might believe the word “*subject*” to have;
- “*subject*” – refers to the word itself (quotations are also given in the quotation marks);
- *subject* – this is just subject, with full ambiguity and with whatever meaning the common usage might associate with it at the moment.

I have tried to place more technical details in the footnotes which therefore can be, for the most, skipped at first or casual reading. They are not, however, addressed specifically to the scholars. Sometimes they elaborate the text but in general will be useful only for those who find some ideas interesting enough to follow them in other authors.



*“In my opinion, to sum it all up, all things that are, are differentiated from the same thing and are the same thing”* Diogenes of Apollonia, DK 64B2

## Book I (of indifference)

# In the beginning ...

### 1 there was Nothingness

*“Even the transcendental subject had to be born.”*

“Why is there something rather than nothing?” What makes one ask? Just because we have 1. the intuition, if not of nothingness, then at least of a sheer possibility of nothingness, its empty intention? But an empty intention, a sheer possibility – isn’t it just the idea of actual impossibility?

Why? Because you *are*, because you were *born*. *Birth* is the separation from the origin and separation results in a confrontation of the separated poles. *Birth* establishes the *confrontation* of the emerging being with the *transcendence*. Such a *confrontation* is existence. “By *existence* we do not mean here the *existence* in the sense of an occurrence and ‘being there’ (being-at-hand) of some being. Neither does “*existence*” mean here the existential worries about body and soul underlying man’s moral care about himself. [...] ex-occurrence is the *confrontation* in the openness of Being as such.”<sup>1</sup> Something is there because we exist and without us, or other *existing* beings, everything would sink back into the indistinct waters of *original nothingness*.

Before any experience, there was *nothingness*; no ‘what’, not even a ‘that’ which is not yet any 2. ‘what’ – but just *nothing*.

One designed notions of mere nothingness *for* consciousness, or *of* our finitude. What we cannot grasp, what we cannot see and embrace may seem to be nothing. And there is a lot of psychological plausibility in such notions. But *nothingness*, the hardly imaginable *indistinct* homogeneity, the *lack* of any objects, concepts, distinctions, is not nothingness of myself, of a subject, for *nothingness* does not know of any subject, it is there long before a subject appears. It is *absolute*. There is no access to it, it is “above anything which even in thought or name could be a mere image or phantom of differentiation, in it vanishes every definiteness and property.”<sup>2</sup> There can be no experience of *nothingness*, for an experience requires a *distinction* – *nothingness* is exactly a total lack thereof.

*Birth* is not an experience, it is the ontological event. It precedes any *distinctions* and so no one 3. remembers own *birth*. *Birth* brings forth an *existence*, that is, a *confrontation*. *Confrontation* is not a relation, it is a meeting. Only when seen as if ‘from outside’ it can be reduced to a relation between two dissociated entities, but to be *confronted* means to encounter *transcendence*, whose ultimate form is *nothingness* of the beginning.

In *confrontation* the separated poles reflect each other. Not in the sense of one being somehow ‘similar’ to another, but because they together, and only together, constitute the uniqueness of the event. *Confrontation*, in all its later and more specific forms, can be likened to a fight or a game in which one opponent *reflects* the other; responding to the other’s moves or punches, he is in fact an *imago* from which one could reconstruct the moves of the other.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, *existence*

<sup>1</sup> M. Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*. IV «“Existenz” heißt hier nicht existentia im Sinne des Vorkommens und “Daseins” (Vorhandenseins) eines Seienden. “Existenz” bedeutet hier aber nicht “existenziell” die auf eine leiblich-seelische Verfassung gebaute sittliche Bemühung des Menschen um sein Selbst. [...] Ek-sistenz ist die Aus-setzung in die Entborgenheit des Seienden als eines solchen.»

<sup>2</sup> Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. A:I.3.b]

<sup>3</sup> As all analogies, this one is not perfect either. Primarily, *confrontation* lacks the symmetry of a fight or interaction.

is *imago* of nothingness (and one would be tempted to say, *imago Dei*).

4. The original confrontation takes place in the midst of nothingness – it is absolute. It is not relative to any particular being, because nothingness is the total lack of any particular beings, the total lack of distinctions.

You were born, and there was time when you didn't exist. But then there was *nothing* – no distinctions which now fill the world you are living in. To put it differently, if there always has been something then no beginning has ever taken place. Beginning, true beginning means precisely this – something emerges from *nothing*. If it emerges from something else, it is a beginning only in a derived, analogous sense given to the word in the practical context of daily experience. If it emerges from something else, it is not new, it is not unique – it is a repetition, no matter how different it may be from everything which preceded it. Absolute beginning, creation from nothingness, is the only way a unique individual, something that isn't a repetition, can emerge. Birth is such a beginning and so no existence can be repeated.

5. To be confronted means to be confronted with transcendence, and such an encounter implies also immediate self-understanding. On the one hand, it implies “being in such a way that one has an understanding of Being,”<sup>4</sup> that one has the understanding of the very fact of confrontation. But to begin with this ‘understanding’ is nothing else but the very confrontation itself, ‘knowing’ oneself to be an *imago* is neither more nor less than simply being confronted, that is, existing. Therefore the “question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself.”<sup>5</sup>

Existence is “in each case mine [...], delivered over to its own Being”<sup>6</sup>. Heidegger does not, of course, mean any solipsistic ‘mineness’, and his emphasis on ‘mineness’ refers rather to the unique individuality, *haecceitas*.<sup>7</sup> Such an individuality is nothing more (nor less) than the event of confrontation. It is only that which ‘I am not’ which delivers me over to myself, which throws me back to myself and makes my own being an issue. For a solipsist there can be no ‘mineness’ for that, as Fichte maintained, arises only in a confrontation with ‘not-mine’. The all-embracing immanence of some postulated spiritual unity is void of any ‘mineness’ except, perhaps, for the one which reminds it that it is not so all-embracing and immanent as it would like to believe. It is only confrontation, encounter with transcendence, which constitutes anything that can have a character of ‘mineness’ – *haecceitas* is involved in the notion of existence only because it is an aspect of confrontation.

6. The original confrontation takes place in the midst of nothingness – as the separation by birth. Although it has many actual analogues, it does not belong to phenomenology – happening above any visible contents, it never constitutes a ‘phenomenon’. Perhaps, it only underlies all phenomena, surrounding everything that appears *for* ..., with an invisible trans-phenomenal rest.

We witness many *births*, of people, of animals, even beginnings of things. Reasonably enough, we see the analogy and think that our *birth* was of the same kind. It was – when seen from outside! If you reduce yourself to this mode of thinking, if you try to ‘jump out of your skin’ and pretend that you are not here, only ‘out there’, you will never be able to appreciate the meaning of *your birth*, and hence neither of any *birth*. For uniqueness of every person is also what is *the same* in every person – those who like paradoxical formulations might say: every existence is a repetition of the unrepeatability of the beginning ...

One can consider one’s *birth* exclusively in the order of causality and dependence, whether natural, biological, physical, or whatever, in the objective categories of externality. Just like one can consider one’s life in such categories. But can one, really? And even if one could, would one like to? One can not doubt that many events preceded one’s *birth*. But this is something one has to realise, something which is not among the first things one learns. One has to develop the whole understanding of the world and even if such a development does not amount to an idealistic constitution, it amounts, at least, to a discovery. This discovery, which we will follow, begins with the trans-phenomenal nothingness.

---

<sup>4</sup>M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Intro.1.4 (H12)

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. I:1.1 (H42)

<sup>7</sup>We will borrow this term – though not the concept itself – from Duns Scotus. (The ‘concrete, i.e., autonomous, lowest eidetic singularities’ from E. Husserl, *Ideas* I:1.1.§15, seem to be exact counterpart of Duns Scotus’ concept.) We do not intend any univocal analogy. E.g., the concept applied to all things, while we apply it only to existence. However, the emphasis it put on the fundamental character of individuality which is not conceptual (*quidditative*) and is really coinciding with, yet formally distinct from, the actual individual, gives very adequate associations.

One may easily claim that a (human) being never has been in such a ‘state of *nothingness*’: 7. before experience there had been simple feelings and sensations which we do not remember but can identify in innocent tests on new-borns, even fetuses. And on embryos? If there was a time when I didn’t exist, if there was a time when no humans, no living beings existed, then there was a time when there was *nothing*. And sure, (human) being was never in the state of *nothingness* – for then there was *nothing*, in particular, not this being.

In our daily life we are surrounded by all kinds of objects which we can, more or less precisely, distinguish from each other. The table in front of me is obviously different from the chair on which I am sitting: they have different properties, occupy different regions of space, one can be moved without affecting the other, and so on. However, the further we look into the past of our personal being the less we find there, the fewer definite objects and experiences. And it is not simply our memory which should be blamed. There *were* fewer objects and less diversity. It is only in the process of growing and education that we learn to distinguish things and experiences which were previously fused with an indistinct ‘background’. It takes time before a child learns that a chair and a table are two separate things. It takes time before it learns that a chair and a table are things at all, before they emerge from the *indistinct* background as two independent entities. And when that happens it happens because they are *distinguished* from the background and from each other, because they emerge as *distinct* things.

Once we begin to distinguish sharply and precisely, it is difficult to recall this original, almost magical power of the surrounding which has not yet fallen apart, where parts have not yet been estranged from the background and acquired independent existence of their own. Perhaps, we can sometimes experience a similar situation when we are placed in an entirely new and unknown surroundings. We do recognise individual objects (this ability, once acquired, hardly ever gets lost) but the whole world appears chaotic, perhaps, meaningless. There are no indications as to which things or observations are significant, which mean something and carry relevant information and which do not. We experience a chaotic variety which – due to the lack of meanings and significance – appears as an undifferentiated, homogeneous totality. Only after some time we are able to pull some objects out of this background, to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant.

These, however, are only imperfect analogies.

The “appearances are not things in themselves; they are only representations, which in turn have 8. their object – an object which cannot itself be intuited by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, transcendental object = *x*. The pure concept of this transcendental object, *which in reality throughout all our knowledge is always one and the same*, is what can alone confer upon all our empirical concepts in general relation to an object, that is, objective reality.”<sup>8</sup> The emphasized phrase is the point from which we would start remodelling Kant to fit our purposes. He speaks here only about the pure concept of such a transcendental object, not about the object itself. Yet, there isn’t much which could distinguish the two, except for the presumed conviction that the two should be distinguished. Allow us therefore to think them the same: emptiness of the ‘pure concept of *x*’ is but a reflection of the pure *nothingness, indistinctness* of *x*.

There is hardly anything in Kant’s Critiques which would justify a *multiplicity* of things-in-themselves. The concept is always one and the same and the whole Kantian exposition might be carried without much (if any) changes if we allowed, equally, only *one* thing-in-itself – inaccessible to the categories of understanding because ... entirely *indistinct*. Different things-in-themselves are equally empty, contentless and transcendental – offering no grounds for being distinguished, they should better remain one and the same. This would make even identity and distinctness of different things of experience a mere ‘appearance’ in the Kantian sense but, with all reservations to be made on the way, we are going to do precisely that.

So, no things-in-themselves but thing-in-itself and, as a matter of fact, not even thing-in-itself, but just *indistinct nothingness*, or the *one*. As we will also see, this *one* does not arise from but, on the contrary, is the *foundation* of experience, and then also of any specific experience of ‘objective reality’.

*Nothingness* is void of *any* experience. But it is as well the simple *one*, the *origin*, since everything 9.

---

<sup>8</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. B137

in the world originates beyond world's boundaries, comes from what embraces it, from the entirely other – in the world's language, from nothingness. "Sacred ignorance teaches me that which seems to the intellect to be nothing is the incomprehensible Maximum"<sup>9</sup> But we do not want to posit too much into *nothingness* which would force us to find it there later through 'sacred ignorance'. *Nothingness* is not any 'Maximum', and even *ens realissimum* has too much of *ens* to be adequate; it is the *virtual*, not *actual* origin, the germ from which everything arises, perhaps a *summum*, but not a sum containing everything *within* itself – being *indistinct*, it does not 'contain' anything. It is the background from which and against which anything that is appears. "All things proceed from the Nothing, and are borne towards the Infinite."<sup>10</sup> And it is the background which, once the world appears, continues to encircle it.

10. Nothingness is what precedes the world, not so much in the temporal order, but in the ontological order of *foundation*. It is the state before things and the world emerged, when "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."<sup>11</sup>

Things arise only from this formless homogeneity, from 'the dark and indistinct waters' which embraced everything before the creation of the world. Whether it is 'creation from *nothing*' or else 'emanation from the one' is only a manner of speaking. It has no adequate names not because our knowledge is finite and imperfect but because the lack of any *distinctions* makes every name inadequate.

The mystery is not how the mind forms, out of the diversity of perceptions and atomic properties, the idea of a sustaining, self-identical object, nor how the objective atoms 'compose' to form the experienced unities. Such questions address secondary constructions and can be asked and attempted answered with full *visibility* of their objects and contents. On the contrary, the mystery is how the original uniformity passes to the multiplicity of independent individuals, how the *one* becomes 'many', or how God creates the world from *nothingness*. "The simplex [absolute] requires no derivation; but any manifold, or any dual, must be dependent."<sup>12</sup>

11. We will not disturb the tranquility of mysteries attempting to answer any 'How?' We only notice that what marks the end of *indistinct nothingness* and a transition towards the world of experience, is that "God divided the light from the darkness"<sup>13</sup>, is *distinction*. The primordial act of creation is an act of *distinction*, turning the *indistinct nothingness* into something, pulling this something out of *nothingness* and letting it come forth, letting it appear. This happens still in *illo tempore*, against the background of mere *nothingness*, before we can talk about any person or subject. We could say, it is *birth* which is the first *distinction* in that a new being is *separated* from the *origin*. But it is immediately accompanied by a multitude of further *distinctions*, which will concern us most.

*Distinction* breaks the original unity. *Nothingness* withdraws and becomes a mere background, a mere stage for the performance of the richness of the world. Every being will now carry within itself the element of the *original nothingness* from which it emerged. Or else, as the Pythagoreans could say, the limit introduced into the eternal and ageless indefinite (*apeiron*) results in the limited cosmos (of *distinctions*) which "inhale" the surrounding air, the boundless (*apeiron*) encompassing all the worlds. *Distinction* does not merely *distinguish* something and brings it forth. Primarily, it introduces the difference between the *distinguished* and the *non-distinguished*, between the 'many' of actual *distinctions* and the *one*, or *nothingness* of the *indistinct origin*. Then it is indeed "most difficult to apprehend the mind's invisible measure//Which alone holds the boundaries of all things."<sup>14</sup> Whether one says that the mind's measure is in the mind or outside, that the beginning was in the mind or not, one puts it wrongly, for (the indefinite and boundless) *nothingness* knows of no *distinctions*, and hence neither of any 'either-or' nor of any 'outside'.

*Confrontation* is the constant circumscription of the boundaries of all things, limiting the unlimited, *distinguishing* the *indistinct*. We might thus characterise existence equivalently as the being which makes the difference and for which things make difference, which *distinguishes* and

---

<sup>9</sup>Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I:17.51

<sup>10</sup>B. Pascal, *Pensées*. II:72

<sup>11</sup>Gen. I:2 [Septuagint has "invisible and non-composite" instead of "without form and void". ]

<sup>12</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:6.4

<sup>13</sup>Gen. I:4

<sup>14</sup>St. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*. V:12 [quoting Solon]

hence for which there is not only the *indistinct* but also *distinctions*; in short, the being which is not merely enveloped by *nothingness* but which encounters something.

## 2 In the begining there was only Chaos, the Abyss

The *distinctions* emerge only gradually as we grow up and learn. As we become more sophisticated and mature, the world becomes richer and more diversified. How and when does the first *distinction* occur? Perhaps, at the moment of birth, perhaps earlier. We do not know. We do not know and it does not matter. What matters is *that* we did begin to *distinguish*. The indistinct waters embracing everything in the beginning withdrew as the primordial act of creation brought the first *distinctions* to the surface. But we do not remember. We do not know and creation remains a mysterious gift of the origin.<sup>12.</sup>

The first *distinction* does not occur alone. Strictly speaking, there is nothing like *the first distinction* – only a transition from the state of undifferentiated *unity* to the multiplicity of *distinctions*. And naturally, one *distinction* may encompass other ones, one *distinction* may be a gathering place of many other. Creation does not merely bring forth a single object but a whole world. We do not merely *distinguish* pain from a formless background but at the same time from hunger and satisfaction, we *distinguish* this light from that darkness, one person from another, mother from father, then a chair from a table ... A *distinction* occurs only in the midst of other distinctions. The gradual emergence of the world amounts only to the gradual refinement and adjustment of the distinctions. At every stage there is always unlimited number of distinctions, in fact, a chaos exceeding our possibilities to embrace it in a single act.

*Chaos* – the limitless manifold, the ever too big, the ever exceeding our capacities number of *distinctions* – is not *nothingness* any more. *Nothingness* has no *distinctions*, in particular, no subjective pole. But *chaos* exceeds *somebody's* power. It has a subjective pole – the *actuality* of our finite being which emerges in its midst. For this *actuality*, *chaos* is the first, differentiated analogy of the *origin*. The *actuality* confronted with *chaos* appears powerless. The *proto-experience* of the limitless *apeiron* is *the same* as the *proto-experience* of the finitude of *actuality*. It is the experience of the impossibility to embrace everything within the *horizon of actuality*. The confrontation with the limitless reveals not *nothingness* but the limited; the limited whose fragility dissolves in the overpowering. This fragility, the finite reflection, *imago of chaos*, is the site of *actuality* or – *proto-consciousness*; the limitless is its primordial correlate.

“*Why* is there something rather than *nothing*? ” and “*How* did *nothingness* become something? ”<sup>13.</sup> are perhaps questions introducing to metaphysics. But there is a grave danger that metaphysics attempting to answer such questions, instead of ending up with saying something – no matter how vague and imprecise, but still *something* – ends up merely glorifying its impotency and inability to say anything.

The celebrated question is certainly different from many others but, nevertheless, shares with them some common ground. For instance, “*How* can the subject be certain that its knowledge represents adequately the external reality? ” Differences notwithstanding, both questions ask for an *explanation*, perhaps, even for a demonstration. “*Why*” and “*how*” are questions more or less successfully addressed by sciences and common sense – the agents seeking *explanations*. But when directed towards the *origins* preceding the world, they can, at best, produce conceptual analyses of dubious value, transcendental illusions and, sometimes, transcendental dogmas. The task of philosophy is not to explain.

If we don't want to end up in a pseudo-science of conceptual analysis, if we renounce the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’, we are left with the simple and audacious ‘what’, or even worse, with the mere *that*. ‘*Why*’ and ‘*how*’ something happens are already involved in the differentiated world of experiences and concepts. But *what* experiences, *what* concepts? The philosophical challenge is to see and say ‘*that*’ something happens and ‘*what*’ this is. ‘*Whys*’ and ‘*hows*’ can only sometimes, and only possibly, help to clarify this ‘*what*’. The challenge is not to explain, perhaps not even to understand but to gather and give an account.

If there was a time when you didn't exist, then there was a time when there was *nothing*. And as something is there now, it must have started to appear some time. That much one can say. But when? How? In the first hour, first minute after your birth? Before? When you were an

embryo? Just after conception? We do not know and it is not important to us. Some time, some things begun to emerge but these somethings were not things, forms, people, etc. as we know them. In the beginning “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep”. Then “God said: ‘Let there be light’ [...] and God divided light from darkness”<sup>15</sup>, then “God made the firmament and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament”<sup>16</sup>. Not before the third day the “grass, the herb yielding seed and the fruit tree”<sup>17</sup> emerged.

“‘Pure experience’ is the name which [one] gave to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories. Only new-born babies, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*, tho’ ready to be all sorts of *whats*; full both of oneness and manyness, but in respects that don’t appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity, can be caught.”<sup>18</sup>

15. If we try to imagine – and we can hardly do anything more than *imagine* – a *proto-experience*, it is like a continuous, irreflective flux of ‘somethings’; a chaos of *pure distinctions* not only without any mutual relations, but without any sameness. One should not focus here on an object, on ‘this pen on the table’, because such an act involves already fixation and *recognition*. I may turn off my reflection and just stare at ‘this pen here’. It is probably as close as I can get, but it is not a *proto-experience*, because there is nothing like ‘a pen’ in *proto-experience*. *Proto-experience* is not an experience of something; it isn’t even an experience of nothing – it just isn’t an experience of anything.

*Proto-experience* does not involve any thing. It does not even involve a ‘*that*’ which is too much suggesting some kind of a definite entity.<sup>19</sup> But it is not *nothingness*; something begun to emerge at the edge of *nothingness* which soon will become the edge of the world. It is like a pure heterogeneity, merely opposed to *nothingness* but not yet incarnated in any definite ‘*thats*’.

It is not *nothingness* because it involves *distinctions*. And whatever is *distinguished* already is. We can never find anything about which we couldn’t, in one sense or another, say that it is. The universal equivocality of the word “is” reflects this fact that to be is to be *distinguished*. Yet these are only *pure distinctions*, like mere facts of mere differences possessing no sameness, no self-identity; it is a flux, a light which isn’t darkness any more but where still there are no ‘*thats*’, no somethings at which one could stop and point.

16. *Proto-experience* is not divided into ‘now’ and ‘then’, it is timeless, that is, ‘objectively’ it may last one second as well as one day. Approaching it phenomenologically, one will easily use images like “a flow of continuous change with the absurdity that it flows just as it flows and can flow neither faster nor slower.”<sup>20</sup> The “flow” is, however, not a name for any flow of time but rather for an ‘overflow’, in the sense of each content flowing over into every other, static co-presence of *distinctions* without any distinguished objects, mutual interpenetration of vaguely distinct contents which, however, possess no inherent identities. “Thus any changing object is here missing; and in so far as in every process ‘something’ is happening, here no process is involved. There is nothing there which is changing and hence one can not speak meaningfully about anything which is lasting. [...] It is the *absolute subjectivity* and has the absolute property of an image as ‘flow’ to the signified [...] For

---

<sup>15</sup> Gen. I:3-4

<sup>16</sup> Gen. I:7

<sup>17</sup> Gen. I:11

<sup>18</sup> W. James, *The thing and its relations*. [This, by the way, seems to be one of the carrying ideas of the late XIX-th century, a crucial aspect of the *Zeitgeist*. Not only the calculus of infinities of Cantor and rigorous treatment of continuity and real numbers emerging from the work of people like Weierstrass and Dedekind, but likewise *durée* of Bergson’s, ‘stream of consciousness’ of Joyce’s and psychoanalysis, the Absolute as experience with distinctions but without relations of Bradley are all variations over this theme. We will rather continue with our presentation, leaving the comparison of the similarities and differences to the interested reader. Our *proto-experience* is, probably, closest to James’. Here the fundamental difference consists in that he very quickly passes from it to another meaning, which is also the cornerstone of his ‘radical empiricism’, namely, a ‘pure experience’ as *actual*, that is, limited to a ‘now’. *Proto-experience* knows as yet nothing about time and such a limitation.]

<sup>19</sup> The reader manages hopefully to distinguish the cases when (like here) ‘*that*’ is meant as a pronoun, and the more usual ones when it is a conjunctive, especially when written *that*.

<sup>20</sup> E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. A:3.§35 «einen Fluss stetiger ‘Veränderung’, und diese Veränderung hat das Absurde, daß sie genau so läuft, wie sie läuft, und weder ‘schneller’ noch ‘langsamer’ laufen kan.»

all that we lack names.”<sup>21</sup> Being timeless it is also spaceless, not divided into ‘here’ and ‘there’. It is like an ‘absolute place’, that is, one not relative to any other place, one beyond which no other place exists, and yet a *concrete* place and not the whole abstract universe. Finally, this concreteness does not involve any subject, there is no subject of proto-experience just like there is no object. There is nothing of the sort because there are no somethings, because *pure distinction* is not a distinction between this and that. Rather, it is a *distinction* without content. From the point of view of later *reflection*, we might also say that it is the mere *fact* of distinguishing.<sup>22</sup> The ‘mere fact’ also because the only thing we can say about it is that it happens – not ‘what’ was distinguished, only that what happened to be, also could be distinguished; above all, there is nothing which could entitle us to say that it was true or necessary to distinguish this rather than that.

All these lacking distinctions are what distinguishes proto-experience from experience, in particular, any experience empiricists ever managed to suggest. Using words like “proto-experience” and “chaos”, we should keep in mind that there is no experience *of chaos*. Proto-experience is not *an experience*. It is *chaos* which was at the beginning, after the darkness of *nothingness* was separated from the light, but before the world and anybody who could experience anything emerged. It is not accessible to any reflective introspection. “Born as we are out of chaos, why can we never establish contact with it? No sooner do we look at it than order, pattern, shape is born under our eyes.”<sup>23</sup> As Husserl used to emphasize and as we will emphasize in what follows, the fact that something is not (an object of) *an experience* does not mean that it is not experienced! We could say that it is co-experienced. As *nothingness* and *chaos* withdraw beyond the horizon of experience, they do not disappear. They constitute an integral part of experiencing as well as of *any experience* and so are given along with it. They are only never given as *objects* of any particular experiences.

Except for being differentiated, proto-experience does not offer anything. It is properly continuous, not in the sense of a successive flux of distinct ‘nows’ and ‘thats’, but as timeless, without any ‘now’ and then. It is *chaos*, but not a chaos of objects (which is secondary) but just *chaos* – of *pure distinctions*, “without number or multitude”, of ‘thats’ which are not ‘whats’ and do not yet pretend to possibly possessing any meaning. It is no longer *indistinct* Parmenidean ‘is’, but rather Anaximander’s *apeiron*, with full ambiguity of the term meaning *both* indefinite *and* infinite, unlimited and limitless. This second hypostasis precedes any later differentiation – “it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some other *apeiron*, from which came into being all the heavens and the worlds in them.”<sup>24</sup> For the moment, there are still no ‘elements’, no things, there are no distinguished objects, as there is no subject making any *distinctions*.

## 2.1 Spatiality/simultaneity

There is nothing like ‘the first *distinction*’; emerging *distinctions* mark simply the second hypostasis 19.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. §35-36. «Sodann fehlt hier jedes Objekt, das sich verändert; und sofern in jedem Vorgang ‘etwas’ vorgeht, handelt es sich hier um keinen Vorgang. Es ist nichts da, das sich verändert, und darum kann auch von etwas, das dauert, sinnvoll keine Rede sein. [...] Es ist die *absolute Subjektivität* und hat die absoluten Eigenschaften eines Bilde als ‘Fluß’ zu Bezeichnenden [...] Für all das fehlen uns die Namen.»

<sup>22</sup>The word “*distinction*” will be, intentionally, used in the equivocal sense: as the act of distinguishing and as that which is distinguished. So far, there are no acts nor things distinguished, and distinguishing between the two would be misleading. Derrida’s ‘*difference*’ is probably a close analogue of this concept. However, we wouldn’t dare to attempt any more detailed review of what *he* possibly might mean, so this is only some hunch that both point to the same intuition.

<sup>23</sup>W. Gombrowicz, *Cosmos*. II

<sup>24</sup>Anaximander, DK 12A9, Theophrastus’ account [after G. Kirk *et al.*, eds., *The Presocratic Philosophers*. III] Plotinus about the limitless: “what is known as the flux of the unlimited is not to be understood as local change; nor does any other sort of recognisable motion belong to it in itself; therefore the limitless cannot move: neither can it be at rest: in what, since all place is later? Its movement means little more than that it is not fixed in rest. Is it, then, suspended at some one point, or rocking to and fro? No; any such poised, with or without side motion, could be known only by place [which Matter precedes]. How, then, are we to form any conception of its being? We must fasten on the bare notion and take what that gives us – opposites that still are not opposed.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:6.3] We would be willing to discern the same theme in many forms: in the chaos of Hesiod, in *materia informis* of neo-Platonism or *materia confusa* of alchemists; likewise, in the symbolism of water, as both the source of life and the confused and hardly differentiated principle: *hydor theion*, divine water, the indistinct image of fertile, life giving, first *arche* of Thales; the world-encircling *Okeanos*, *aqua vita* of the alchemists.

in which the primordial *nothingness* turns into *chaos* – a manifold of heterogeneity. However, the time has not yet begun to flow, there is as yet no *distinction* between the *actual* and *non-actual*, not to speak about any succession. Another word for this may be “*heterogeneity*” or “*simultaneity*” – all *distinctions* are simultaneous, not because they were comprised into a simultaneity, because all ‘before’ and ‘after’ have been abstracted away, but because there is, as yet, no ‘before’, no ‘after’. Likewise, there are as yet no entities which could be distinguished through their properties. There is no sign of distance, nor any measure, because *distinctions* are merely distinct – not so that an *x* may be more distinct from *y* than from *z*, but only so that *x*, *y* and *z* are simply mutually distinct, and are not even any identifiable *x*, *y*, *z*.

This feature – mutuality which means also simultaneity of *distinctions* – can be taken as the fundamental characteristic of *spatiality*. Thus *spatiality* (not space, but mere simultaneity of *distinctions*) is somehow prior to temporality. It is a mere expression of the fact that *distinctions* do not arise one after another<sup>25</sup>, that the level of *chaos* involves immediately a whole range of mutually different, heterogenous elements. *Chaos* is the virtual co-presence of a manifold of *distinctions*.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 Distinction

20. To *distinguish* means to cut out of the formless background of the *proto-experience*. To “connect” means to connect distinct somethings; it presupposes distinct ‘thats’, and the difference between now and then, between here and there. In order to connect we first have to *distinguish*.

To *distinguish* means, in the primordial sense, to encounter *for the first time* – and only once; to encounter the ... entirely new, the ... never encountered before. But this ... isn’t anything specific, it isn’t ‘this something’ as distinguished from ‘that something’. *Distinction* does not involve relation, it does not distinguish ‘this’ from ‘that’. *Distinction* is anything that makes a difference; but making a difference does not require being noticed, making a difference does not require being perceived. It *distinguishes* ... from the background and thus makes it appear – not *for* anybody, not *for* so beloved consciousness which can hardly be postulated at this stage, but just *appear*: in the middle of *indistinct nothingness*.

*Before anything recognisable emerges, something must be first distinguished from the background. Distinction is a cut from the indistinct: formless – and hence also timeless – background.*

And how and when did the first *distinction* appear? Ridiculous question. As far as I am

---

<sup>25</sup>This happens too, but it is a completely different – factual, and not, as here, virtual – process.

<sup>26</sup>Looking for an intuition of *chaos* in our *reflective experience*, we are naturally bound to recognise in it an element of duration. Bergson’s *durée* comes very close to our *chaos*, if only we are willing to subtract from his descriptions the phenomenological element of observing consciousness. “Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. [...] We can thus conceive of succession without distinction, and think of it as a mutual penetration, an interconnexion and organisation of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought. [...] In a word, pure duration might well be nothing but a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate each other, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalise themselves in relation to one another, without any affiliation with number: it would be pure heterogeneity.” [H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*. II;p.100-101-104]

We notice here the crucial ambiguity which penetrates Bergson’s *durée*: it is succession but, on the other hand, it is a pure heterogeneity, simultaneity. “Bergson’s duration is eventually defined less by succession than by co-existence.” [G. Deleuze, *Bergsonism*. III] Duration may be imagined and posited ‘in itself’, as merely happening ‘out there’ without any witnesses. As such, it can be imagined and posited as not requiring any simultaneity, as merely flowing. But, of course, one has posited it, that is, gathered all this duration in the simultaneity of one act. Only extreme objectivistic abstraction can allow itself, while considering duration, to dispense with the one actually apprehending it. Any form of apprehending duration requires simultaneity, requires juxtaposition of some earlier and some later moment in one act. This aspect of simultaneity and constancy is more emphasized by later Bergson. “A *moving continuity* is given to us, in which everything changes and yet remains.” [H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*. IV:3;p.197] The dissociation of the experience into ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ happens to the distinctions which are originally present in one unified field: “Psychologists who have studied infancy are well aware that our representation is at first impersonal. [...] If you start from my body, as is usually done, you will never make me understand how impressions which concern that body alone, are able to become for me independent objects and form an external world. But if, on the contrary, *all images are posited at the outset*, my body will necessarily end by standing out in the midst of them as a distinct thing, since they change unceasingly, and it does not vary.” [Ibid. I;p.47 [my emph.]]

*Durée* can be taken as a close analogue of *chaos* if we emphasize this aspect of simultaneity rather than succession, and then dispense with any attempts of identifying any particular contents.

concerned, I do not remember. If there was a time when I did not distinguish then, *a fortiori*, I couldn't remember this time. Because to remember means to remember *something* and when there is *nothing* then there is nothing to remember either.<sup>27</sup>

Psychologists, however, biologists or brain researchers can say something more definite on this 21. 'how'. Although objective 'whens' and 'hows' do not concern us so much, let us, nevertheless, make a short detour into infant psychology since it may provide some concrete illustrations.

Neonates have preference for sweet taste but, for instance, "weak saline solutions are not found aversive, because they have been experienced before birth, as amniotic fluid."<sup>28</sup> There is a vast experimental evidence on a wide spectrum of innate abilities to distinguish various stimuli, many of which are probably present before birth and which develop rapidly during the first months of life.

For instance, during the first weeks, the intake of food is regulated by stomach distension irrespectively of the amount of calories in the food. 'Full stomach' is a distinction which leads to the reaction 'stop sucking'. One shouldn't claim that it is distinguished *from* 'empty stomach' – these are just two *distinctions*, originating in the same organ but, otherwise, unrelated to each other. It doesn't seem plausible to assume that a cry of a hungry infant – shall we say "of an empty stomach"? – in the first weeks of life has any intention of filling the stomach.

At around 6 weeks<sup>29</sup> much more sophisticated regulatory system emerges based on monitoring blood sugar and other, more peripheral mechanisms (like gastric-emptying rate). After the age of 7 weeks infant's system can no longer "be fooled" by low calories food which is now compensated either by increasing consumption or frequency of feeding until the energy needs are met. These are, of course, the terms in which we describe the observations but they do indicate that the system attunes and reacts to new *distinctions* which weren't registered before.

And now, more interestingly, what is it that can so be *distinguished* from the background? One 22. would say, a thing, 'this table here'. Perhaps. And things too are cuts from the background. But 'this table here' seems rather too complicated – or better, too specific and precise – an object. A 'that' would be better, but the question concerns exactly what, from our later perspective, such a 'that' might be. Possibly, it can be a sensation, especially an intense one, heat or warmth, pricking. One only should keep in mind that it is not *my* sensation – it is a sensation of a newly born (or, perhaps, very primitive) being. It is an autonomous sensation of a peripheral organ provoking possibly, but not necessarily, a reaction which need not be mediated through the central nervous system.

But original *distinctions* can be much more than just sensations.

1. Vision acuity in the neonates is somewhere between 10 to 30 times poorer than in the adult.<sup>30</sup>  
It develops rapidly and from about 6 months it is at near-adult level but initially it prevents the infants from making all too fine visual *distinctions*.
2. 2-day-olds shown a square in different slants, on the test trials preferred to look at a novel shape, trapezium, even if the slants might have given the appearance of a square.<sup>31</sup> Similar experiments with cubes of various sizes indicate that, to begin with, infants prefer stimulus giving the largest retinal image size. However, when desensitised to the changes in the distance (and hence retinal size) of a constant-size cubes, they strongly preferred different-sized cubes on the subsequent trials. The experiments suggest that infants as young as two days, can distinguish both slant and retinal size but also have the ability to perceive objective, real shape and size.
3. 2-day-olds show preferences for moving, rather than stationary stimuli. At about 6 weeks they can distinguish coherent, biomechanical motion and prefer it to a random one. These tests did not present any moving objects but merely point-light displays produced by filming a person in the dark who has points of light attached to his major joints.<sup>32</sup> The general

<sup>27</sup>Hence, by the way, we got it other way around than those who imply that distinction presupposes memory. Not at this level, at least. *Distinction* and *recognition* are different things and the latter presuppose the former.

<sup>28</sup>G. Harris, *Development of taste perception and appetite regulation*.

<sup>29</sup>Perhaps earlier – this is the age for which experimental data have been gathered.

<sup>30</sup>A. Slater, G. Butterworth, *Perception of social stimuli: face perception and imitation*

<sup>31</sup>A. Slater, *Visual perception and its organisation in early infancy*

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

distinction of organised motion can be thus thought as an ‘innate’, or original, category of distinction which need not evolve from the subsequent observations of moving objects.

4. Few-days olds fail to recognise a three-dimensional object after having been shown its photograph which indicates that the *distinction* between two- and three-dimensional objects is more significant than their possible similarities.<sup>33</sup>
5. 4-day-olds seem to have a preference for human speech above music, and music above noise.<sup>34</sup> A one week old girls can *distinguish* a baby cry from a background of general noise of a similar volume.
6. 1-day-olds seem to discriminate visual stimuli according to the degree of contrast rather than to the actual pattern.<sup>35</sup> Still, given approximately the same contrast, face or face-like pattern will be preferred to other patterns. Within few hours after birth, neonate’s reaction to mother’s face shows that the face is *distinguished*, perhaps even *recognised*.
7. There is some evidence that infants are attuned not only to face-like patters but also to the emotional expressions, including facial, vocal and gestural movements of others.<sup>36</sup> 1- to 2-day-olds can focus on and imitate – in a voluntary and not merely reflexive effort – a wide range of expressions, like sad, happy and surprise.<sup>37</sup>

One study shows that two to four days old girls spend twice as long as boys maintaining eye contact with a silent adult and also look longer than boys when the adult is talking. Also, baby girls are more easily comforted by soothing words and singing – even before they can understand language, they seem to identify the emotional content of speech.<sup>38</sup>

Few-weeks old infants show clear preferences for happy rather than sad, as well as attractive faces. They also seem to discriminate faces according to gender.<sup>39</sup>

In a famous experiment<sup>40</sup> a 2-months-old and mother were sat in front of a television monitors showing the other’s face. When the images were transmitted in real time, the two engaged in an apparent proto-conversation, initiating communication and responding to the other’s signals. When then video was replayed with a delay of 30 seconds, and thus mother’s expressions did not represent any adequate responses, infant showed considerable distress, turning away from and darting brief looks back at the mother’s face.<sup>41</sup>

The intention is neither to give an overview of this research nor to suggest that it constitutes a proof of anything. But it provides illustrations, if not sufficient grounds for some of the following claims.

23. *Distinctions* emerge gradually, in a top-down fashion, from the general and diffuse ones, they gradually become more acute and precise. They involve initially only some rough, vague categories rather than sharp, specific differences. Every *distinction* is, on the one hand, ‘real’ or ‘true’ in that it arises from the background, it pulls something out of the undifferentiated homogeneity of the one. On the other hand, however, it is ‘uncertain’ or ‘unsharp’, it does not draw an absolute, definite border between *x* and *not-x*, it merely sketches the *distinguished* pole. It is like the adjacent stripes of the rainbow, mutually distinct but without any definite boundary separating them from each other. *Distinctions* are like waves: here is one, there another, and there yet another, but

<sup>33</sup>A. Slater, G. Butterworth, *Perception of social stimuli: face perception and imitation*

<sup>34</sup>M. Harris, *Language and its pathology*

<sup>35</sup>A. Slater, G. Butterworth, *Perception of social stimuli: face perception and imitation*

<sup>36</sup>D. Messer, *Referential communication: making sense of the social and physical worlds*

<sup>37</sup>V. Reddy *et al.*, *Communication in infancy: mutual regulation of affect and attention*, A. Meltzoff, M. K. Moore, *Newborn infants imitate adult facial gestures*, A. Meltzoff, M. K. Moore, *Imitation in newborn infants*.

<sup>38</sup>C. Hutt, *Males and Females*, A. Moir, D. Jessel, *Brain Sex*

<sup>39</sup>A. Slater, G. Butterworth, *Perception of social stimuli: face perception and imitation*

<sup>40</sup>L. Murray, C. Threvarthen, *Emotional regulation of interactions between two-month-olds and their mothers*

<sup>41</sup>Similar distress was observed in infants confronted with mothers assuming indifferent ‘blank face’ posture or affected by postpartum depression, J. F. Cohn, E. Tronick, *Three-month-old infants’ reaction to simulated maternal depression*, L. Murray, *Intersubjectivity, object relations theory and empirical evidence from mother-infant interactions*.

The infamous experiment of Friedrich II (in which new born infants, deprived of any emotional and verbal contact with adults, died all together) was interpreted already by the contemporary chronicler in the same way as we would tend to interpret it today (if only the experiment was recorded adequately; as it is, one could easily imagine all kinds of reasons of the deaths other than the lack of contact). E.g. E. Seidler, *Der Neugeborenversuch Friedrichs II von Hohenstaufen*, also E. Kantorowicz, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*.

where one ends and the next begins, nobody can tell. We only can point to the peaks and thus be sure that there are, indeed, different waves.<sup>42</sup>

The so called “paradoxes” of Heap or Sorites<sup>43</sup> appear as paradoxes only under the assumption that *concepts* draw rigid *distinctions* with uniquely identifiable boundaries and, as a consequence, uniquely determined negation. But although this may be the case as long as one plays with the concepts obtained by *distinctions* and constructions within the sphere of prior *reflective dissociations*, it does not apply generally to the contents *experience*.<sup>44</sup> But primarily *panta rei* and even later, in the world of words, *concepts* and apparently rigid *distinctions*, everything still flows into another, the imperceptible shades of meaning attached by different people to the same understandings make them unexpectedly drift apart, as the differences come forth and drag one and the same thing in opposite directions. Moreover, a *distinction* can be always refined, made more precise. Yet, although never reaching the final, definite, rigid form, the *distinctions* exhaust the content of the world, for as Dr. Johnson observed, the fact of twilight does not mean that one cannot tell day from night.

From the very beginning *distinctions* aren’t limited to sensations but concern structures and objects which, according to traditional empiricism, would have to be “constructed” from the material of minute sensations. Furthermore, a thing, understood as a definite, well-defined object, is by no means a fundamental component of our *experience*. What is *distinguished* from the formless background is pretty accidental and it may be just ... anything. It may be an ‘abstract’ property, like a shape, a size, or a colour; it may be warmth or movement, an emotional expression of another or a feeling.

The original *distinctions* do not discriminate between different *kinds* of objects because one thing is not distinguished from another but from the background. Everything counts equally: properties and relations, some actual things, sensations, changes, motions, continuous processes not composed of any parts, feelings, emotions. No things are more fundamental than others. Before we can begin to *experience*, we have to first make enough *distinctions*, from which the later experience may be built.

*There is no hierarchy of original distinctions; no distinctions are more fundamental than others.*

Sure, something which later will be called a “thing” can be *distinguished*, too. This table can be *distinguished* too. To begin with, it is nothing, or else, as an integral part of the background, it is not at all. There may be a play of lines and shades which run indiscriminately through the table, the wall, the windows. In the psychological experiments one always attempts to make sure that infants are presented with a distinct stimuli not to be confused with other unintended elements of the environment. But even such a complex thing as a table, when somebody pushes it aside thus effecting a *distinction* of the sub-chaos of lines, forms, shades and colours from the surrounding chaos, and, at the same time, giving them totality, may give this sub-chaos, which we call table, a new status – of something *distinct* from the rest.<sup>45</sup>

*Originally, things, like other distinctions, are just cuts from the indistinct background of proto-experience.*

This lack of any organisation of the first *distinctions* involves, in particular, lack of any temporal discrimination. There is no time, and a *distinguished* thing counts equally with a *distinguished* sensation or a *distinguished* emotion.

It remains to be seen if the ‘square shape’ is *distinguished* on the basis of generalisation or innate predispositions. But in any case, if this is what is *distinguished*, then it does not involve only a purely *actual* object but something, well, universal.

Hunger is something that does not appear just like that. It increases gradually. When it eventually hits the barrier at which I say “I am hungry” and an infant begins to cry, it involves

<sup>42</sup>Analogous phenomena are observed in experiments (with adults) concerning span of apprehension. When multiple letters are briefly exposed, only some are identified although all are certainly seen. The subjects insist that they were there, clear and distinct, can even tell their number but can not identify them.

<sup>43</sup>One stone is not a heap, neither are 2, nor 3 stones, nor 4, nor... So when do we get a heap? Likewise, removing the stones, one by one, from a heap, when exactly does the heap cease to be a heap? Man with no hair is bald, and so is man having only 1 hair, or 10 hairs, etc. But when exactly does man cease to be bald?

<sup>44</sup>These formulations may sound a bit cryptic at this point. Section 4 below should provide enough clarification; concepts are then discussed in II:1.2.

<sup>45</sup>Common motion is used, for instance, to test infants for object permanence.

not just this moment now but the continuity of the whole development, of its gradual increase. It is never so that I am not hungry in one moment and then, in the next, I suddenly am. *Experience* of hunger involves something which is not, seen ‘objectively’, purely *actual*.

Fear aroused by possibly very different circumstances, the atmosphere of love and acceptance not connected with any specific person or actions, security or insecurity, all kinds of emotions which, unlike sensations, cannot, in general, be classified as arising and occurring in a specific moment, are among things which can be *distinguished* along with colour, shape, size, motion. ‘Objectively’ speaking, these *experiences* require more time to occur, but since the time has not yet begun to flow, they all are equally just cuts from the indistinct background. *Proto-experience* itself is timeless and knows not only no difference between ‘this’ and ‘that’, but neither any between 1 second, 20 minutes and 5 days. Consequently, something which is later determined as an object can be *distinguished* in the same way, on the same footing, and with the same status, as something we later will call a “property”, a “complex”, a “process”, a “feeling”, a “conjunctive relation”.

*The primordial distinctions are not limited to objects given within a here-and-now; they may bring forth something actual, like this colour, or this table, as well as changes, processes and emotions which span over ‘long periods of time’.*

## 2.3 Signification

26. In spite of its indeterminate, timeless and spaceless character, despite its reactive and objectless character, despite its entire lack of relations, *distinction* involves a virtual *signification*. For the moment, not in the sense of one thing signifying some other thing, but merely in the sense of cutting off the *actual distinction* from the rest, from the background. The former, except for being *distinguished*, or better, precisely by being *distinguished*, involves also an immediate reference to the background from which it emerged. In this sense it is a *sign*, a *sign* of all the rest, of all that was left behind when the *distinction* has been made.

This aspect of a *sign* in every *distinction* expresses merely the mutuality of the two poles, the fact that *distinction* arises only from something which, only from now on, can be properly called background. It is the seed of two later poles of *actuality* and *non-actuality*. Everything *actual* will always be interpenetrated by the *non-actual*, every *here-and-now* by *there-and-then*. And this signifying reference is not the result of abstraction or successive experiences but the very beginning of experience. As a bare reference to the indefinite and indefinable ‘something more’, ‘all the rest’, it will be later involved in all life, consciousness and, in a derivative form, in all specific signs and representations.

27. The primordial *signification*, as the aspect of the first modification of the *original confrontation*, founds the permanent and indissoluble awareness of ‘something being out there’, expressed by the common uneasiness with all kinds of solipsism and subjectivism, as well as by Samuel Johnson’s refutation of idealism. Every *actual* object and situation, every *actual* experience is haunted by the all-permeating shadow, the *non-actual* rest. But experience is only “haunted” by it, because experience is always directed to something more specific, never to this indefinite “murmur of being.”

We do not have any experience of the objectivity of the world, because this objectivity is rooted in *proto-experience*, is something preceding any experience, and thus more primordial than the world. We do not have any specific experience of it, only a sense of it – as imperishable as it is ineffable, as *clear* as it is *vague*. The ‘out there’ comes before any ‘something out there’; the separation of light from darkness comes before any particulars.

## 3 In the beginning was Word

“when all things were in disorder God created in each thing in relation to itself, and in all things in relation to each other, all the measures and harmonies which they could possibly receive.”

Plato, *Timaeus*, III:37

28. Chaos, though created from *nothingness* and thus, in a way, opposed to it, is not yet the world. It is like the *materia prima*, or even *confusa*, from which world can be created. In the world there are no *pure distinctions* but things – things which may disappear and then return because they

have some identity, some sameness; things which can be seen and thought because they can recur, that is, be recognised.

To recognise is to signify and recognition is a *sign*. This structure of *sign* is no longer a mere *signification*. It means that something *actual* carries with it the burden of *non-actuality*, it points towards something that is not entirely *here-and-now*.

It points from *here-and-now* to somewhere else or sometime else, ‘outside’ of *here-and-now*. A *sign* is something which points from the *horizon of actuality* somewhere ‘outside’ it, which makes something *transcending actuality* present. Things are *signs*, words are *signs* and *signs* are what make the world emerge from *chaos*.

The exposition of *proto-experience* can be summarised thus: in *proto-experience* something is 29. *distinguished* but nothing is *recognised*.

We have to speculate to the extent that we do not recognise and do not remember. Experience is *pure*, is *chaos*, to the extent it does not involve *recognition*. Any talk about it is thus bound to be a speculation. Or, if you prefer, it is a mystery how God created the world from *nothingness*, how He *divided* light from darkness and the waters under the firmament from the waters above it. But it is also a mystery how He, having separated these *virtual* elements, created the things which we recognise. But our concern is not with ‘how’ but with *that* and ‘what’.

*Pure distinction* does not distinguish *A* from *B*, but only brings forth *A* against the *indistinct* background. *Recognition* is to *proto-experience* what *distinction* is to *nothingness*: it cuts off what is *recognised* from the *chaos*, from the formless horizon of *proto-experience*. It brings forth not only a *pure distinction*, an unrelated and unconnected ‘in itself’, but an appearance, that is, an appearance of *something*. To appear is the same as to be *recognised*; nobody would like to speak about unrecognised appearances (although this, like most expressions, can also be given some meaning). But also only appearances bring forth ‘somethings’. Properly speaking, only from now on the word “*something*” can mean something which is not a mere reflex but a ‘this’, which has some character and sameness.

To be sure, *recognition* is not *reflective*, it is not made by *you*, but it is what will make *reflection* and *yourself* possible.

### 3.1 Sign and recognition

*Recognition*, the separation of *actuality* from *non-actuality*, finds a *sign*: not any more a merely 30. *virtual signification* of ‘all the rest’ as in §26, but a *sign* of *something*. *Recognition* refers ‘this here and now’ to ‘that then and there’, brings forth something *actual as* something else. Any connection between *distinctions* involves a *sign* in this elementary sense that an *actual* appearance signifies another, *non-actual* or even *non-actual* one.<sup>46</sup> As yet no *sign* appears as a *sign* – *sign* means here just the ‘re-’ of the immediate *recognition*. It is a *sign* in the sense that something *actual* points to, or just is continued in *something* else, something *non-actual* or *non-actual*, even if the two are immediately merged into one and thus the *sign* is entirely transparent.

And how and when did the first *recognition* occur? Ridiculous question, indeed. As far as I am concerned, I do not remember. If there was a time when I did not *recognised* anything then I couldn’t remember that time. Because to remember means to remember *something* and when there is *nothing* then there is nothing to remember either. We let the child psychologists say a few more words concerning these ‘hows’ and ‘whens’.

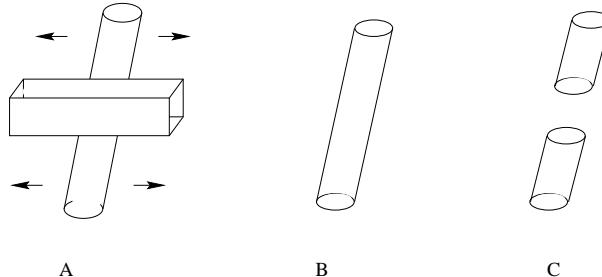
A confusion might have arisen with respect to the word “*preference*” when relating the experiments 31. on neonates in §22. We said that *pure distinction* cuts something off the background and not from another something, while one prefers something to something else. Infants’ “*preferences*” is the name given by the psychologists to what is measured in the quoted experiments: the reaction to or time span of attention to given stimuli, the longer time span indicating the greater “*preference*”. It is certainly disputable whether this is what such a time span reveals. For our part it is sufficient to assume that different reactions indicate the fact of *distinguishing* the given stimuli.

More significantly, we wouldn’t claim that *distinguishing* necessarily precedes *recognising*, that they are really dissociated and temporally ordered events. The two may overlap and while

<sup>46</sup>We will later distinguish between the *non-actual* things which could be *actual* but just happen not to be *here-and-now*, and the *non-actual* ones which never can be fully *actualised*. *Non-actual* contents presuppose *non-actuality* and so, occasionally, we may omit the latter designation leaving it implicit.

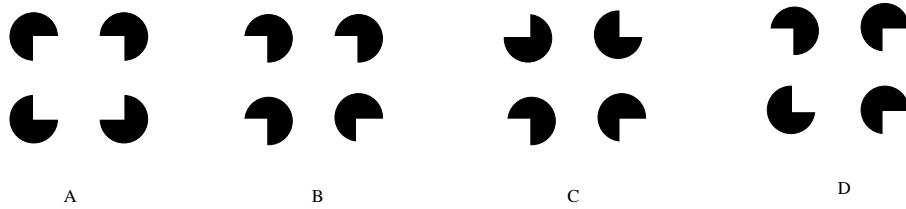
some things are recognised at some stage, others may be distinguished only later. The very fact that the experiments involve, first, a habituation stage, when infants are familiarised, possibly, desensitised, to some stimuli, which are then used in the trial tests may be taken as an indicator that from the very first hours infants also recognise various stimuli. There seems, however, to be sufficient differences in the character of the stimuli to which infants respond, to classify them into *distinctions* and *recognitions*.

32. One of the most significant changes concerns object permanence observable, for instance, in that infants search for hidden objects. According to Piaget<sup>47</sup> such a search that is guided by a representation of the hidden object develops in the final stage of infancy, after 18 months when infants first show capacity for symbolic representation. The recent research, and techniques of habituation, indicate that, whether guided by representation or not, perception from very early age has an objective character.<sup>48</sup>
1. 4-month-olds were habituated to a rod which moved back and forth behind an occluder, *A*, so that only the top and the bottom of the rod was visible.



On subsequent trials the babies were shown two test displays without the occluder, one, *B*, being a complete rod, the other, *C*, being the top and the bottom parts, with a gap where the occluder had been. The babies spent more time looking at the two rod pieces.<sup>49</sup> One is more than willing to interpret it in the obvious way: the original common motion of an occluded rod leads to object completion – perception of one moving object; two unoccluded separate pieces are then a kind of surprise to a four month old infant. Babies younger than 4-months, however, perceive the complete rod as novel.

2. It is important to emphasize that the object permanence does not seem to be a matter of a definitive either-or.<sup>50</sup> It is suggested that permanence, as well as representation, develop gradually, from briefly permanent objects to solid and varying representations.
3. 3- to 4-month-olds perceive subjective contours.



Infants familiarised to pattern *A* discriminated in the subsequent trials this pattern from those, like *B-D*, not containing subjective contour. Infants familiarised to *B*, however, did not discriminate between it and other patterns without subjective contours. The difference between patterns with and without subjective contours seems to be greater than the difference between patterns without such contours.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup>J. Piaget, *The Construction of Reality in the Child*

<sup>48</sup>Our recognition has little to do with representation which appears at yet later level of experience.

<sup>49</sup>A. Slater, *Visual perception and its organisation in early infancy*

<sup>50</sup>P. Willatts, *Beyond the 'Couch Potato' infant...*

<sup>51</sup>A. Slater, *Visual perception and its organisation in early infancy*

4. At about 4 months one can observe *distinction* of perceptual categories. Familiarised to a number of stripped patterns which differed in their orientation but were all oblique, the infants on the test trials ignored other, new and differently oriented oblique patterns and preferred a novel vertical pattern.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, shown distorted versions of some prototype shape (square, triangle), on the test trials infants treated the never before seen ideal shape as familiar and directed their attention to a distorted, even if seen before, version.
5. If 3-month-olds are shown a series of pictures of horses, within a few trials they will form a perceptual category of horses that excludes zebras and various other animals.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, 7 to 11 months olds showed categorisation at a ‘general level’, differentiating animals from vehicles, even birds from aeroplanes, without, by the same time, categorising at a ‘more basic level’, i.e. without differentiating dogs from fish or dogs from rabbits.<sup>54</sup>
6. Again, as in the case of *distinctions*, infants seem much earlier attuned to communication with others. Not later than at six to eight weeks, this attunement is not limited to the purely *actual* situation. Following disruptions in the other person’s communicative behaviour, 6- to 8-week-olds attempt a series of other-directed acts. If the adult is unresponsive the infant may increase the intensity of the proto-conversational expressions, like vocalisation, arm movements. When the other is looking elsewhere, infants develop ways of “calling” the other, for instance, with a shrill vocalisation with a pleasant expression and gaze on the other’s face.<sup>55</sup>

As there was no order and hierarchy among the emerging *distinctions*, so there is no such inherent order in *recognitions*. A rod can be *recognised* as well as a shape, a perceptual category as well as a feeling, a friendly and coherent response of another person, as well as an object. 33.

*Recognition* of object’s permanence testifies to the emerging *distinction* between the *actual* and the non-*actual*, even *non-actual*, where the *actual* functions as the *sign* for the *non-actual*, but also for the unity of both aspects. This is the stage where we can properly start talking about signs in the more common sense of the word.

What distinguishes the above examples from those concerning *distinctions* in §22 is the *non-actual* 34. or *non-actual* element discernible in the infants’ reactions. Infant sees two separate parts but fills this *actual* stimuli with the missing part and perceives one rod. The disrupted communication with the other makes the infant attempt to attract the other’s attention. Shall we call it “intentionality”? Why not? Thus understood, intentionality is just the presence of the *non-actual* or *non-actual* in and through the *actual*, the pressure it exercises on the *actuality*. It is a more crisp, more definite modification of the virtual *signification* from §26. But the word “sign” might be preferable – it captures better this relation of the *actual* functioning here as a *sign* of something which is not *actually* given. The objects appear only to the extent they transcend the pure *horizon of actuality*, or better, this is what gives an appearance an objective character. An appearance, a *sign* is *actual* through and through, is exhausted within the *horizon of actuality*. An object, on the other hand, bears the dual character consisting of the *actual* and the *non-actual* moments. This *non-actual* aspect is what gives it the objective character surpassing the subjectivity of mere appearance. Pure *subjectivity* means pure *actuality*; *subjective* is only what is exhausted in an *actual* experience and does not hide, does not keep anything for itself, like the passing feelings and immediate sensations.

The presence of the *non-actual* and *non-actual* in all *experience*, its penetration through the *actuality*, may be, perhaps, called “intentionality”. Even in the least reflective moments of *experience* one hardly ever focuses exclusively on the merely *immediate sensations*, everything is always interwoven into the texture of other, *non-actual* experiences and eventually of *non-actuality*. The transcendental subject is what, in the philosophy of pure *actuality*, plays the role of the *non-actual*; it is responsible for endowing the *actual* contents with the noumenal identity, that is, inaccessible source of all possible contents. For idealism this constitution, like everything else, must happen instantaneously, ‘now’. But intentionality need not be so dissociated from the rest of *experience*;

---

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>J. M. Mandler, *Development of categorisation: perceptual and conceptual categories*

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>V. Reddy *et al.*, *Communication in infancy: mutual regulation of affect and attention*, D. Messer, *Referential communication: making sense of the social and physical worlds*

it is only its *actual* moment, the focus which gathers various threads into the totality of the *actual* phenomenon. ‘Intentionality’ is a phenomenological expression of the co-presence in any experience of the *non-actual* aspect which, nevertheless, is viewed exclusively from the perspective of *actuality*. What constitutes the unity of these two aspects is just the fact that it is gathered, appears – true, itself, but only through a *sign* – within the *horizon of actuality*. Even if two parts, and not one rod are present, the whole one rod is now perceived, and if, in the next moment, it turns out to be two after all, it is a surprise. Life is full of such surprises and no transcendental constitution of objects of adequate intuition can force it to always conform to our expectations, sorry, intentions.

35. We have not yet attained a full *dissociation of actuality* from *non-actuality* and *non-actuality* which still remain in the unity of a *virtual nexus*. But they have begun to be *distinguished*, to play the role of two *distinct aspects*. It is therefore too early to speak about abstract *signs* which we will encounter in the following section. Yet words, or at least some vocal signs, begin to appear and function as *signs* at this early stage. It is, moreover, exactly the relative lack of *dissociation* of such a *sign* from its meaning (characteristic for the current level) which accounts for its *creative* role.

A child learning its first language (or languages) is not in the position of an adult who recognises different contents and only has to attach to them appropriate linguistic expressions. For a child the words are tools, as many others, of drawing the *distinctions* in the matter of experience. Acquisition of the first language proceeds along with the process of differentiation in which no difference is given between the *actual sign* – the word – and the distinguished, signified content. Both emerge simultaneously and words are not merely ‘attached’ to things but are the *signs* which bring things forth. Providing the means of drawing the *distinctions* (the most elementary example might be recurrence of particular words in situations from which, eventually, the child distinguishes the element signified by the recurring words) and organising the *chaos of distinctions*, the first language contributes to the creation of the world.

It is thus also understandable why learning the first language is so natural and easy while later learning a foreign language so difficult. Learning the first language is learning the world, is the emergence of the world for the first time. It takes some years, but it also happens without conscious effort – the language comes to a child as naturally as the world does. For one who has already acquired the world, learning a new language implies almost always translation of his world to the other world of the foreign language. This is the most challenging part of foreign language acquisition which is responsible for the associated difficulty. A person speaking fluently another language will never translate it into one’s own – he will live in the world offered by that other language as naturally as he does in his original world. What may happen here in terms of fusion of different worlds, and how the difficulty of learning a foreign language increases with the linguistic distance between the two, are certainly interesting topics, but would bring us too far off our main track.

### 3.2 Actuality

36. The lack of the spatio-temporal aspect in the *chaos of distinctions* is based on the lack of any proper difference between the *actual* and the *non-actual*. There is only simultaneity of *distinctions* and the *virtual signification* which refers a *distinction* to the *indistinct rest* but not to any specific, *non-actual* or *non-actual* something. Before recognition, pure experience is heterogenous but continuous or, if you prefer, simultaneous – in short, spatial (in very rudimentary sense) but timeless, even non-temporal.
37. Like *distinctions*, *recognitions* are not limited to minute *immediacies*. Although an element of temporality has emerged through the fusion of *actual* and *non-actual*, *recognitions* are just cuts from the *chaos* with no ‘objective’ time-stamp on them. Whether it is a missing part of an object, a general schema of several instances, a lack of other’s attention or a lasting feeling of satisfaction – the ‘objective’ duration does not matter for the event of *recognition*.

Something born at one moment and dead two hours later wouldn’t be able to recognise ‘a day’. There is no specific moment – no single act – when we encounter ‘a day’. Day, by its very nature, lasts, i.e., cannot be embraced by a single act within the *horizon of actuality*. (If it were explained to this something what ‘a day’ is, it might understand it, perhaps, acquire a concept of ‘a day’,

but this would require development of the understanding of the objective world.) What takes time is not to develop a concept of ‘a day’ but to have enough experience to be able to cut from its background a unit which is denoted by this word. And initially, *in illo tempore*, what is recognised as such units may be anything which only later reflection will classify as single things or complexes, as immediate sensations or anything endowed with temporal duration. But temporality has not yet entered the stage; a sign involves only a primordial separation of its actuality, on the one hand, and its meaning, on the other; the meaning which may embrace distinctions not only not actual at the moment but genuinely and essentially non-actual.

Thus, although objectively speaking recognition requires some passage of time, so from the point of view of experience, there is no time before something has been recognised. Recognition is not a repeated earlier cognition, it does not juxtapose two separate images. It merely fixates an actual sign as something involving also non-actuality. It cuts off the recognised something from the chaos of pure distinctions. This separation brings forth – in fact, is – the separation of here-and-now from there-and-then, or better, of here-and-now from not-here-and-now. It founds actuality, where what is recognised appears, and which is distinguished from the non-actuality, from the rest of the – first now, only potential – things.<sup>56</sup>

Recognition of something from the chaos establishes the horizon of actuality as distinct from the background, which now becomes a not-here-and-now. 38.

The name “here-and-now” should emphasize that we are talking here about elementary horizon of actuality, not any kind of time. It is equally spatial and what we call “non-actual” (and even more so “non-actual”) means as much ‘there’ as ‘then’, or rather, ‘not-here’ and ‘not-now’. Here-and-now is like a site, a location, a designated point in the midst of its surrounding; it is not yet differentiated into space and time. But the further breaking of the horizon of experience into temporal and spatial dimensions is based on this nexus of the two primordial aspects: the actual and the non-actual. The horizon of actuality marks actuality but there is as yet no ordering, no past or future, no mutual relations between recognitions except that of being distinct and that of a sign: this actual vs. that non-actual or even non-actual. These two aspects mark only the first modification of the spatiality from §19. Their tension will later give rise to temporality and its directedness, but here the ‘not yet’ is still indistinguishable from the ‘already not’, the thirst of an expectation is not yet different from the remembrance of a loss.

The horizon of actuality encircles the simultaneity of actual recognitions which, in turn, carry within the distinction between the actual and the non-actual. It isn’t any longer a mere simultaneity; it is a simultaneity which is, so to speak, doubled, followed by a shadow of non-actuality. In so far as it involves simultaneity, it will give rise to space; in so far, as it involves element of non-actuality and non-actuality, it will give rise to time. But it precedes both space and time, is their spatio-temporal nexus, the nucleus from which the two aspects will be dissociated achieving their eventual crispness.

*It is recognition – in which something is distinguished from something else – which gives this something actuality. Recognition means a kind of proto-focus, a distinction of the bare actuality from non-actuality. This horizon of actuality is the spatio-temporal nexus of the subsequent distinctions of space and time.* 39.

---

<sup>56</sup> As always, we have a nexus of aspects which here involves emergence of actuality, recognition of some content, and several others to be observed in the rest of this section. With respect to the horizon of actuality, one might be tempted to say something like: “The original time field is obviously limited, exactly as perception is. In general, one might well dare the claim that the time field always has the same extension. It kind of slides over the perceived and freshly remembered movement and its objective time, like the field of vision moves over the objective space.” [E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. A:2:§11 «Das originäre Zeitfeld ist offenbar begrenzt, genau wie bei Wahrnehmung. Ja, im großen und ganzen wird man wohl die Behauptung wagen dürfen, daß das Zeitfeld immer dieselbe Extension hat. Er verschiebt sich gleichsam über die wahrgenommene und frisch erinnerte Bewegung und ihre objektive Zeit, ähnlich wie das Gesichtsfeld über den objektiven Raum.»] Of course, the expression “the same extension” can hardly mean ‘definite and fixed in minutes or seconds objective duration’. It may rather intend the fact that actuality retains its character of a horizon, its identity as constitutive for a new level of being, also across the variations in its objective duration. But it is not constitutive in isolation, for it is only one aspect of a nexus and ‘now’ is relative to other aspects, e.g., “In the ideal sense, a perception (impression) would be a phase of consciousness which constitutes a pure now, [...] perception constitutes actuality. In that a now as such emerges before my eye, I must be perceiving.” [Ibid. A:2:§16-§27 «Im idealen Sinne wäre Wahrnehmung (Impression) die Bewußtseinsphase, die das reine Jetzt konstituiert, [...] Wahrnehmung konstituiert Gegenwart. Damit ein Jetzt als solches mir von Augen steht, muß ich wahrnehmen.»]

Any attempts to relate temporality to a succession of objects or perceptions are concerned with secondary notions, time and space or spatio-temporality of, so to speak, higher order. They are projections of *reflection* and *reflective experience* of time. But by the time when we reach the reflective stage, the *spatio-temporality*, interwoven into the primordial *recognitions*, has sunk into the depths of proto-conscious life. We can, perhaps, reach it by imagination but hardly by introspection.

40. If one prefers another kind of story, it was time (Cronos, if only we are allowed to identify him with Chronos or, as we say, *spatio-temporality*) who, castrating his heavenly father, Uranus, separated heaven and earth, Gaea. Before the appearance of time heaven and earth were married, but time separated them from each other, bringing forth multitude of distinct things on earth or – as the myth has it – the war with its heavenly father. Then, time keeps devouring its own children but, eventually, just like the highest and first gods, heaven and earth, had to give place to a more earthly time, so also time itself, Cronos, having entered the stage at the very beginning, has to yield its place to his son, Zeus, who does not any more rule over the heaven but over the sky, weather, thunder and other lesser gods. Cronos is from then on inaccessible to the earthlings, either ruling Elysium, the Golden Age of the origins, or imprisoned by Zeus in the very depth, in Tartarus or even in a cavity behind it.

### 3.3 Awareness and self-awareness

Everything we are taking about are still primordial – still only *virtual* – matters. But these *virtualities* constitute the nuclei on which their more advanced forms, once developed, will rest and to which they will always try to return.

41. The notion of consciousness originates from our reflective experience, where we can easily differentiate between moments of reflective – in the common language, yes, just conscious – attention given to something, and the greater part of our experience which goes without such a particular attention. And all that empiricism ever managed to say on the subject concerns this commonly understandable notion.

Yet, although the reflective experience is what concerns us most, we do not have to throw away the baby with the bath water. If we weren't immediately aware of ourselves and our activities, we could hardly pause to reflect over them. Beholding a view I can be completely absorbed in it or, as one says, unconscious of it. Yet if interrupted and asked "What are you doing?", I can immediately answer "I am beholding this beautiful fiord." The answer involves an act of reflection, but I can give it only because I have already been aware of what I was doing. Calling this awareness for (self-)consciousness is probably too optimistic, but it is what philosophy of consciousness used to do.

It is here that the confusion arises and it concerns the impossibility to discern the intended meaning of the word "consciousness" – the word simply refuses to be completely dissociated from its common meaning. No matter how transcendental and primordial consciousness becomes, it always bears the marks of reflection. Although one claims to be talking about consciousness which is *not* reflection, the reader may be at any moment exposed to a transition in which something follows about consciousness because it can be justifiably said about reflection.

42. The principle of intentionality may serve as a good example. The principle postulates an intentional object, that is, a definite correlate of consciousness. Sure, what characterises *reflective attention* is exactly its focus on some particular object. This break of continuity, *dissociation* of a particular object and narrowing the horizon of attention to it with exclusion of everything else, is what distinguishes *reflection* from the experience otherwise. *Reflection* conforms perfectly well to the principle of intentionality and it may be a reason for its great popularity. It makes the *reflective act* the paradigm for our whole being.

A lot of abstracting effort is needed to bring it down to the level of *experience*, because most of *experience* does not conform to it. A feeling of restlessness is an experience which does not provide me with any object, any intention. It may be, but also may be not, aroused by some specific events, but once it appears it is not directed towards anything. In fact, it can be characterised as a search for an object which could calm it down. Once found, it terminates the experience of restlessness. Kierkegaard's experience of 'Angst' made some phenomenologist invent 'nothingness' as its intentional correlate. With all respect for the ingenuity and justification of the analyses,

the whole point was that ‘Angst’ does not allow me to get hold on its source, that no possible intention can account for the experience.<sup>57</sup> It may be methodologically pleasing to substitute the experience of ‘nothingness’ for the experience of ‘Angst’. But it is a straight way to disregarding the content and the character of such an experience. The former tries – in spite of all denials and explicit statements to the contrary – to posit an object while the “of” of the latter does not refer to any object. It does not refer to anything! It is equally adequate to say “an anxious experience” as “an experience of anxiety” and in both cases it is clear that neither ‘anxiety’ nor anything else is the object of the experience but that the phrases designate its quality, in particular, its objectlessness.<sup>58</sup> Calling nothingness the “intentional correlate” of the experience of ‘Angst’ is to pay a lip service to the methodological postulates.

What used to be called “consciousness”, perhaps, “immediate consciousness”, “non-thetic consciousness” or “apperception”, we will call “awareness”. The following may be taken as a merely normative definition, not of consciousness in its common sense, but of its germ haunting the post-Kantian idealists:

*Proto-awareness is actuality.*

It is not founded upon, it does not emerge from, it is not involved in – it *is* the *horizon of actuality*, the horizon within which all contents, all *recognitions* have to be inscribed in order to become *actual*. It is as much the place, the ‘here’ defined by the position of the body and the reach of the perceptual field, as the ‘now’ of the immediate presence.

All these aspects: *recognition*, *actuality* and *sign* are *equipollent aspects* of one *nexus* of experience. *Equipollent*, that is, simultaneous and irreducible to each other. Trying to account for one of them, involves immediately the other, and that irrespectively of which is taken as the starting point. In this rudimentary sense, *proto-awareness* serves merely as an abbreviation for this *equipollence*, simultaneity and interplay, of these aspects centered around the *horizon of actuality*. And *nothing* more! No subject-object relation, no consciousness-of, no appearance-for. It is merely an emergence of mutually distinct, recognisable contents, whether sensations, things, moods or feelings. A play of shadows can fill the *horizon of actuality* equally well as a pen or an anxious feeling.

When the *actual* contents emerging in *proto-awareness* become recognised, we may with greater 44. confidence speak about *awareness*. There is no sharp border separating *proto-awareness* from *awareness*. As *recognitions* emerge gradually from the *chaos of distinctions*, so does *consciousness* emerge gradually from the pure *actuality* of *proto-awareness*. The former is a modification of the latter effected by the sufficient degree of the non-*actual* aspect in its contents. *Awareness* is still *actual* but only in the sense that it is fully absorbed in the *actual sign*. This *sign*, however, carries now with itself an element of non-*actuality* which is sufficient to indicate that it extends beyond the pure *horizon of actuality*.

*Awareness is the difference between the actual and the non-actual.*

45.

An *object* is not a necessary correlate of *awareness*, it is only one possibility. (Unless we want to use the name “objects” for moods, feelings, vague intuitions and the like.) Properly speaking, we shouldn’t even use the word “correlate” here, unless by this word we mean an aspect, that is, one among several elements of a *nexus*, none of which has any priority above others. *Awareness is actuality*, the *horizon of actuality* in which all kinds of contents may emerge: some of them as vague as the original intuitions of *chaos* and *nothingness*, as apprehension of holiness or intangible evil, of meaning or meaninglessness; some of them more specific but still indefinite, without any identifiable essence, as feelings and moods; yet other quite precise and, although containing the *non-actual element*, emerging in an unveiled and full *actuality* of a transparent *sign* like things and concepts or minute sensations – simple *objects* – which are eligible to a complete grasp by the acts of *reflection*. Appearances are *actual*, everything that appears does so only within the *horizon of actuality*. For most contents which themselves can not be fully fitted within this *horizon*

<sup>57</sup> Heidegger, in his considerations of the moods was close to this realisation. But it seems that it was Levinas who was the first to point out the limitations of the principle to the *actuality* of conscious experience.

<sup>58</sup>In fact, we can discern here a slight transition expressed by the two phrases. “An anxious experience” stays still close to the objectless quality, focuses on the unity of the experience. “An experience of anxiety” marks already a more reflective dissociation, an attitude of a more distanced ‘experiencing subject’ to the ‘object’ of this experience which arises anxiety. We will follow this transition in the subsequent sections.

this means that they appear exclusively through their *actual signs*. What constitutes the formal difference between different kinds of contents is the *distance* – the *experienced distance* – which separates the *signs* from the *distinguished contents*.

46. In all cases, the objective aspect of awareness emerges through the *recognition* of something *actual* as something non-*actual*. The sharper presence of the non-*actual* element signals the sharper modification of *temporality* from §39.

In a *recognition* of, say, the room I am in now as the room I left yesterday, the sameness of the *actual object* is its coincidence with the memory of it. But we are not, as yet, reached the past and future dimensions of *temporality*. *Recognising* one rod behind an occluder, “filling in”, as a phenomenologist would say, the missing part between the two, synchronously moving ends, isn’t exactly like an invasion of the past into the presence. Perhaps, no rod has ever been seen and there is no ground for speaking about recognition of something past. *Recognition* is not the same as *re-recognition*. ‘Filling in’ may be of any character: it may be filling in of something known from the past but, equally, it may be a mere, unjustified and unfounded expectation, a wish to find something non-*actual* there. The past is being accumulated but there is yet no experienced difference between something which receded into the *non-actuality* of the past and something which awaits in the *non-actuality* of the future.

47. Awareness, the *distance* separating the *sign* from its content, the *actual* from the non-*actual*, is of course the same as the *distance* separating the content from the *actual sign*. Being aware of ‘...’ is the same as to be aware of the *distance* separating this ‘...’ from the *actuality* of awareness. But this is the same as being aware of the very awareness itself, of the very fact of being aware. *Self-awareness* is an aspect of awareness. It is even an *equipollent aspect*, for *self-awareness* is nothing more than awareness of being aware, which is again just the *distance* separating the *sign* from its content – it is always and only consummated in the event of being aware of ‘...’. Every event within the *horizon of actuality* is the event of awareness and *self-awareness*. (We only have to keep in mind that these aspects do not mean any *reflective consciousness* or *introspection*.)

In the jargon of Fichte: Ego is equiprimordial with Non-Ego, positing non-Ego is also self-positioning, while self-positioning is only positing of Ego against non-Ego. Sartre would say that consciousness is equivalent to self-consciousness. Any consciousness, being a consciousness of ..., is the consciousness of ... being different from the consciousness itself, i.e., is self-consciousness; and vice versa, any self-consciousness is only consciousness of itself being different from some ..., i.e., is consciousness.<sup>59</sup> Awareness of this *equipollence* precedes the philosophy of consciousness. As Aristotle says, it is “by sight that one perceives that one sees”<sup>60</sup> – seeing, like any other act consummated within the *horizon of actuality*, is an event of *actual awareness* and, *by the same token*, of *self-awareness*. Proclus: “Every intellect apprehends itself. [...] Every intellect in its act knows that it apprehends. Intellect whose feature is to apprehend is not different from that which apprehends that it apprehends.”<sup>61</sup>

If we subtract the differences in the vocabulary and concepts, all these formulations say the same: awareness and *self-awareness* appear simultaneously or not at all, they are *equipollent aspects* of the same *nexus of experience and recognition*.

48. Awareness is not any faculty of a *subject* – it precedes *subjectivity* of any experience. Neither is it any quality, property which accompanies experience – the two are *equipollent aspects*. It is not so that you (or an ant, or a bat) can have an *experience* without also being aware: to have *experience* is to be aware. It does not mean that you have to be *reflectively conscious* of what this *experience* consists of, what it presents, etc. As Nagel says it, an organism has consciousness

<sup>59</sup> “[C]onsciousness is aware of itself *in so far as it is consciousness of a transcendent object*.” [J.-P. Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*. I:a] “[E]very unreflected consciousness [is] non-thetic consciousness of itself.” [Ibid. I:b] The two are *equipollent*: “the necessary and sufficient condition for a knowing consciousness to be knowledge of its object, is that it be consciousness of itself being that knowledge. This is a necessary condition, for if my consciousness were not consciousness of being consciousness of the table, it would then be consciousness of that table without consciousness of being so. In other words, it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious – which is absurd. This is a sufficient condition, for my being conscious of being conscious of that table suffices in fact for me to be conscious of it.” [J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. Introduction:3]

<sup>60</sup> Aristotle, *On the Soul*. III:2.425b12

<sup>61</sup> Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §§167-168 [Although Proclus’ concept of intellect (which translates *nous*) cannot be identified with our concept of awareness, it seems that “intellect in its act” can be. (Justification makes it quite clear “[...] since it sees that it apprehends, and knows that it sees, it knows that it is intellect in act [...]”) In any case, it is legitimate to claim that the quote refers to the same *equipollence* we are considering here.]

(awareness) “if and only if there is something it is like to *be* that organism – something it is like *for* the organism.”<sup>62</sup> This famous ‘to be like’ is fine, only that there seems to be no need to distinguish it from *experience* – experiencing things may be taken precisely as that which ‘it is like’ to have ... this form of experience. It does not require any ‘mental states’, any concepts, any introspective consciousness but just that: a particular way of experiencing.

The crucial thing is the *equipollence* of awareness and *self-awareness*. In the following Section, we will see more and more sharp *distinction* between *actual* and non-*actual*, the *sign* and the content, eventually, the *subject* and the *object*. This will be associated with the gradual transition of awareness and *self-awareness* towards *reflection* and *self-reflection* – and the respective *dissociation* of the two aspects.

Consciousness is anything between these two extremes – it, too, is a matter of degree, which on this scale corresponds to the degree of *precision*. In the rest of the book, we will use “consciousness” in a non-technical sense but one may always exchange it with “awareness” or else “reflection” – the results will hardly ever be incorrect, though usually different, as these represent only the limiting cases.

## 4 Reflection

We have thus arrived at some structure of the concept of *experience*, of *recognition* within 49. the *horizon of actuality*, following the stages of *nothingness* and *chaos*. The latter, although they do not constitute separate *experiences*, form always *present* background accompanying any *experience*. The ultimate *nothingness* is the outermost horizon of *experience* – not only in the logical order, but also in the sense that it is the deepest aspect of any *experience*. *Experience*, and any particular *experience* is always surrounded by this ultimate homogenous background. Its first modification is the *chaos of distinctions*. The virtual *signification* of a *distinction*, in the midst of this chaotic modification, refers to the underlying *nothingness*. And finally, in the midst of ‘all the rest’, within the *horizon of actuality* surrounded by ‘something more’, there emerge *recognitions*, *signs* which not only refer to their original background but which carry *non-actuality* within themselves, confronting awareness with contents exceeding its *horizon of actuality* and, by this very token, constituting also *self-awareness*.

Experience is an inexhaustible source of novelty and surprise, the source of ever new *recognitions* 50. offered by the *chaos* and, eventually, *nothingness*. Thus we might think that the only thing to do is to study *experience*, to ask how it emerges, how it is multiplied, developed, refined. In the extreme case, we might assume the objectivistic attitude toward *experience* and, miming the attempts of sciences, try to *re-construct* it, build its model from *actual* concepts.

But even if we do not go that far, a study of *experience* is seldom what it pretends to be – instead, it is a study of *experiences*. Conceiving *experience* as a series, a totality of *actual* experiences, splitting *experience* into *dissociated experiences*, such an activity marks a new mode of being which, emerging from and, so to speak, within or into *experience*, places itself outside *experience*.

This is achieved through *reflection* which is to *experience* what *recognition* is to *chaos* and *distinction* to *nothingness*: further and sharper differentiation. It is a *re-recognition*, but of second order; it is a *distinction* abstracting something which, in *experience*, has already been *distinguished* and *recognised*. Now, this is *dissociated* from the *experience*, externalised as an independent *object of reflection*.

Acts of pure reflective consciousness involve a mere registration ‘that ...’, that something is, that it is so-and-so. This is the abstract characterisation of *reflection*: the mere observation ‘that ...’ But the underlying theme of such ‘that ...’ is precisely the *dissociation* of ‘...’ – the ‘that ...’ points specifically to ‘...’, focusing on this particular ‘...’ rather than another. The conjunctive “that ...” expresses but this fact of isolating, cutting this particular ‘...’ from the context of *experience*, which now becomes its surrounding.

*Reflection* amounts to splitting *experience* into *experiences*. We may *reflect* over the whole 51. *experience* as such, but such a *reflection* would require *distinguishing* ‘*experience*’, opposing it to something else. Consequently, it either can not become an *object* of *reflection* or else becomes such

---

<sup>62</sup>T. Nagel, *What is it like to be a bat?*.

an *object* only ceasing to be itself. Primarily, reflection focuses on a particular situation, particular context, a particular thing. When it does not and tries to capture some greater totality, it turns whatever it is reflecting over into its *actual object*. In either case, one ends with a particular (object or situation) posited as an independent entity – independent because dissociated from the surrounding of experience.

An experience – a particular, limited totality of distinguished and recognised contents – is a correlate of a reflective cut through experience.<sup>63</sup> It need not be an act of deep thoughtfulness; any, most common act of focusing on this rather than that, is an experience, a conscious experience, an act of reflection in this sense. ‘Reflection’ in the more common sense, an attentive reflection is but reflection carried to its extreme. It brings perhaps a new quality to experience but it does not bring anything else which is new – it only dissociates further and more definitely, fixates and freezes the contents offered to it in the reflective experience.<sup>64</sup> This ultimate possibility of reflection arises when the reflectively isolated ‘...’ becomes completely dissociated, that is, posited as thoroughly independent, self-subsisting entity, when *distinguishable* is seen as *dissociated*, when separable becomes separated, when, following Hume one admits “that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences.”<sup>65</sup> This leads to the experience of *objectivity* which we will encounter pretty soon.

52. *Distinctions* make *nothingness* into *chaos* and *recognitions* make *chaos* into *experience*. But *nothingness* did not disappear under *chaos*, and *chaos* did not disappear under *experience* – they only withdrew beyond the horizon to stay and surround the *experience*. A *distinction* is the virtual signification, contains a reference to *nothingness*. Similarly, every *recognition*, besides the reference to something *non-actual*, contains also the reference to *chaos* by which it is surrounded. And *reflection*, having posited its *actual object*, contains always also a reference to *experience* – which surrounds it.

These references, these inherent significations are not appropriations. On the contrary, *nothingness* is inaccessible through the *distinctions* and *chaos* is inaccessible through the *recognitions* – precisely because the latter are just what transform the former, what change them into something else. Now *reflection* changes the *experience* into an *experience*, into ‘experience diversified into separate experiences’. From this perspective, *experience* remains an inaccessible horizon, surrounding the *reflection* with the perpetual intention to integrate what it has *dissociated* back into the continuous texture of *experience*. An attentive, positional, truly thoughtful and reflective ‘reflection over experience’ is but a more intense, sharper modification of this primary structure of reflective *experience*.

53. Inaccessibility deserves a short remark. It does not mean that *reflection* is entirely unaware of *experience* or that *experience* has no contact with *chaos*. To say this would be to abstract, to dissociate. All these are aspects of an individual being, which experiences as it reflects, which is immersed in *chaos* as it experiences and which touches *nothingness* through the *chaos* of its depth. Inaccessibility means the impossibility of recovering the mode of being, the quality of the higher level, using exclusively the categories of the lower one. It can be attempted reconstructed but all such attempts are bound to dwell in and apply the categories characteristic for the level from which they are undertaken. The problem is not to forget them, to erase them, to jump to the higher level, but to accommodate these categories so that they do not gain exclusive power and thus break the continuity which underneath the increased dissociation of the lower levels leaves the traces of the higher ones and connects the different levels of one being.
54. To be sure, *recognitions* effected already diversification of *experience* into various sub-totalities of *signs* and *objects*. But this means only that *experience* is not a homogenous background nor a pure *chaos*, it is not an indistinct but a differentiated flux of heterogenous variety and manifold. A particular sub-totality of this variety is what, traditionally, one would call “an *experience*”. However, we have to pay attention not only to what is *distinguished* but also *from what*. Recog-

<sup>63</sup>As always, we do not search for any causes, we do not ask which element yields which but consider them as aspects of one *nexus* – here, the *nexus* of reflective *experience*. Although the word “correlate” emphasizes the element of *dissociation* and opposition, it is not meant to abstract from this fact.

<sup>64</sup>Sartre’s ‘positional consciousness’ is a good expression denoting the same as our *reflection*. The ‘positional’ aspect is just the effect of *dissociating* the *object* from its background, ‘positing’ it as the only correlate for the *actual thought*.

<sup>65</sup>D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Appendix [to be inserted in Book I:3.14 (p.161) after the words “any idea of power”, p.636]

nitions, emerging from *chaos*, constituted the horizon of experience, the field from which various experiences can be later dissociated.

Experience is not a *totality* of experiences; on the contrary, it is a mode, a level of being which, preceding, *founds* particular experiences. *Recognitions* differentiate experience but do not *posit* separate experiences – these are distinguished but not made independent from each other. This happens first through *reflection*. The basic rôle or, if you prefer, the functional definition of *reflection* is just that: *dissociation of experience into experiences*, emergence of abstract *signs* and of the *dissociated, external objects*.

Thus *reflection* is a *new* mode of being which *dissociates* from the flux of experience a particular totality, *an experience*. Any further, attentive discourse about *experience* or about *an experience* involves a prior *reflective dissociation* of this aspect from the horizon of experience. “When we speak of different experiences, we can refer only to the various perceptions, all of which, as such, belong to one and the same general experience.”<sup>66</sup> An experience emerges as a part of experience only through an act of *dissociation* – reflective focusing on this particular aspect of experience, *positing* it as the *actual object*.

Just like the earlier processes of *distinction* and *recognition* so, too, *reflection* can bring forth and fixate *anything* from experience. Which particular ‘...’ is *dissociated* into a given experience, is the matter of this particular *experience* and *reflection*. Just as before, so for *reflection* there are no universal principles defining what is basic and what is secondary, what is first and what last. The only general rule is that *reflection*, confronted with the *excess* of experience, like *recognition* was confronted with the excess of *chaos*, proceeds gradually from indefinite and vague towards more specific and precise. It also has the strong tendency, though it is only a tendency, to focus on the *distinctions* and their configurations which can be embraced within the *horizon of actuality*, which can be naturally represented.

## 4.1 Representation

*Distinction* introduces the primordial *signification*, underlying and all embracing reference to the ultimate ‘outside’, *nothingness*. *Recognition* happens through a *sign* – an *actual distinction* which merges into some non-actual ones, an *actual* reference to something non-actual and, by the same token to the *chaotic* background. *Reflection* brings in a *representation* – a *sign* but not any more an immediate and transparent one but a *sign* which is given as a *sign*.

*Representation, sign as a sign*, is the first form of *repetition*, the *repetition* of the *recognised experience* as a *dissociated experience*, as an isolated totality which through this act of *reflection* becomes *repeated*, i.e., acquires the character of an independent event, no longer merged with the background of experience but merely *related* to other experiences. The word “*re-presentation*” expresses this double perspective on the same – as a moment of the unity of experience versus as an entity extracted from it. The *reflected* experience *repeats* the *unreflected recognition*. And this very *repetition* is also *dissociating* the repeated aspect from its background. Thus, *representation* is not any new thing, any copy, any miraculous internal duplication. It is just a next level of differentiation, it is a part of experience which has been more sharply isolated, a *dissociated* part cut out of the whole.<sup>67</sup>

I am in a room and catch myself focusing, staring at one piece of furniture. I stare at this cupboard and as I do it, it loses its earlier character of being just one, indifferent aspect of the whole room. It gains importance of being on its own, of being in the focus. Sure, its surroundings, the whole room, are still present here, but the cupboard has been pulled out, cut out of the room and is experienced in a new way. It has been doubled: I experience the fact of its being merged with the background, of being there but, on the other hand – and simultaneously – I re-cognise its particular status of a *dissociated entity*, which my *reflection* found there (in its form, perspective, colour, solidity, what not...), but found there only through its very act of *dissociation*. The two are the same but also the latter *repeats* the former, is the continuity of the former represented in

<sup>66</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. B-138 [We would not, of course, restrict the differentiation to ‘various perceptions’ only since, unlike Kant, we do not identify the ‘matter of experience’ with sensations. This and other conceptual differences notwithstanding, the quoted formulation and its underlying intuition fit the present context.]

<sup>67</sup>In Hegelian or Bradleyan terms, a particular is an abstraction from the totality. In Bergsonian terms, a perception is a part of the perceived, is the very object of perception stripped of some, at the moment irrelevant or overlooked, aspects.

the discontinuity of a single act.<sup>68</sup> Representation repeats its *object* by merely drawing a contour around it, a border which not merely distinguishes but also dissociates it from the surrounding experience.

Thus it is not a repetition in the common sense of ‘recurrence of the same for second time’. Yet, this common ‘repetition as recurrence’ is founded on the possibilities opened up by the primordial reflective repetition. The latter is not confronted by the problem of “how do I know that this is really a repetition of *the same* thing?” Indeed, starting with the ready made things, with the objects dissociated within the *horizon of actuality* by reflective experience, the possibility of repetition presents a mystery. And one need not go as far as the possibly infinite series of repetitions – a single repetition, recurrence of *one and the same* thing only *twice*, is already something mysteriously ideal. But the original repetition is merely a dissociation from differentiated experience of its particular aspect; it is an emergence of a *sign as a sign*, of the difference between the repeating and the repeated, between the *sign* and the *signified* – but this whole event happens within the *horizon of actuality*. Thus there is, as yet, no way to talk about ‘second time’, there is no question about how one knows that the two are the same – it is the same experienced simultaneously from two different angles, as if in two different contexts. Representation in the more common sense of the word is but a sharpened version of this initial representation. It is a more explicit repetition – it presupposes something *of which* it is a representation as already given. To be represented, this something must be already more or less definitely and precisely dissociated from other objects. Our representation is the event of this primal dissociation. Thus dissociated units found then also the possibility (in fact, the need) of representation in the more common sense, of a one dissociated thing or image by another, in short, of abstract *signs*. (We will return to the abstract signs in a moment, §59, and to the question of ‘repetition as recurrence’ when discussing identity in II:2.2.3.i.)

57. The reflective repetition can also be called “double dissociation”. The act of reflection dissociates this cupboard from the rest of experience as an independent *object*. It singles out a unit which can be contained within the *horizon of actuality*, and which is contained there with the exclusion of everything else. “The mark of the mind is that there do not arise more acts of knowledge than one at a time.”<sup>69</sup> The object acquires thus a special status as compared to all the rest of experience which is, for the moment, ignored by reflection. (This implicit reference to ‘all the rest’ is the earlier mentioned *signification common to all signs*.)

On the other hand, the object of reflection has been already experienced, it is something which has already been recognised. In fact, the more intense my attempts to grasp and embrace the cupboard by my attentive look, the more it loses its real presence, its reality withdraws and gives place to the domination of my reflective attention, becomes a mere representation. The original representation is just a dissociation of an experience from experience, a sharp dissociation of an object from the background and, by the same token, from itself. An *object* appears by being so dissociated – an act we call “*positing*”. Dissociation is definite, it actually ‘tears the object out of the context’ and, desiccating it, lends it independent identity. As a consequence, the object no longer coincides with its *sign*, it has been externalised and the *sign* appears as a *sign* – it does not coincide with the *signified* whose intended experience has been dissociated and turned into ... the *object of reflection*. In so far as it is a *sign*, it indicates the background; in so far as it does it as a *sign*, it makes also clear the *distance* separating it from this background. This *distance* is now also the distance separating the reflective *sign* from its *object*, which is only another way of saying that *sign* appears as a *sign*.

We will call this double dissociation “externalisation”. Reflection externalises. This is the characteristic feature distinguishing reflection from the earlier processes of distinction and recog-

<sup>68</sup>There are several places in G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* indicating that this might be a legitimate interpretation of his notion of ‘repetition’. Fichte makes the following observation concerning the meaning of copula: “In the statement A=B, A denotes that which is now posited; B that which is encountered as already posited. – *Ist* expresses the transition of Self from positing to the reflection over the posited.” [J. G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre*. I:1, F.11 «So bezeichnet im Satze A=B, A das, was jetzt gesetzt wird; B dasjenige, was als gesetzt, schon angetroffen wird. – *Ist* drückt den Übergang des Ich vom Setzen zur Reflexion über das gesetzte aus.»] “Reflexion” does not refer to philosophical reflection but to the structure of immediate experience. If we replace B with another A, and then read *recognition* for “*Setzen*” (positing), we obtain a possible description of our repetition (without, of course, claiming that this was all Fichte wanted to communicate in this passage).

<sup>69</sup>The Nyaya Sutra. I:16

nition.<sup>70</sup>

## Signs and meaning

*Distinction* is indiscriminately the event of distinguishing *and* the distinguished content. Similarly 58. the *signs of recognition* coincide with the signified – if not in fact (that is, not in so far as the *actuality* of the *sign* might have been only a limited aspect of the possibly *non-actual distinctions*), so in any case in experience, in so far as *sign* does not appear as distinct from the signified. *Reflective signs* do not do it any more; the *sign as a sign* is constituted exactly by the dissociation of the *sign* from the signified.

The background has been now diversified into a variety of *representations* – *representations* which parade as if they were the objects, the *signs as signs* which, precisely by the fact of being mere *signs*, make it possible to embrace within the *horizon of actuality* more objects (that is, *signs*) than if we were to keep there the objects themselves. *Sign as a sign* means: to represent a *non-actual* (possibly also *non-actual*, or else only *external*) object by means of a *sign* which (i) is dissociated from this object and which (ii) fits completely within the *horizon of actuality*.

The point (ii) is particularly relevant here and might be even taken as conditioning (i). It applies namely even if the object itself could not be comprised within the *horizon of actuality*. “This” is perhaps the paramount case of a *sign* which refers to something so *immediate* that it often escapes all more specific means of linguistic identification. On the other hand, *reflection* over pleasures or pains is bound to use mere words “pleasure” or “pain” with only approximate and never finally determined meaning. As the object of discourse becomes more and more remote (life, world, love, God), the *distance* separating it from the *actual signs* becomes longer and more clear. The *distance* in general separates *actuality* from *non-actuality*, §45. In the current case of *reflective signs*, it amounts to their inherent inadequacy, the impossibility to capture the signified. (This inadequacy is, in fact, if not the same as their *meaning*, so in any case a witness to their involvement into more than merely *actual* relations.) With respect to *actual objects*, it may be their mere *externality*; it increases with respect to the *signification* underlying all *distinctions* and becomes virtually infinite with respect to the *invisible origin*.<sup>71</sup>

The appearance of *distance* amounts to a new discovery: the *sign* need not be an aspect of the 59. signified, the two are *dissociated* and so may be *put into a relation* to each other. Thus emerges the possibility of abstract (or conventional) *signs*. Abstract *signs* are the ones which have been completely *dissociated* from their meaning. Artificial and conventional *signs* provide the most typical examples. ‘Smoke’, as a *sign* of fire, is still only a *sign*, in so far as it means only that: fire. When used for the purpose of signaling it becomes an abstract *sign*. Thus appears also the trace which the prior unity leaves among the actually *dissociated* aspects, the relation between the *sign* and the signified.<sup>72</sup> We call this relation “*meaning*”. It is the bond which still keeps the *actual signs as signs* and the possibly *non-actual* or externalised *distinctions* together. Or else, it is the means allowing the use of abstract *signs* for actually drawing some *distinctions*. But the bond notwithstanding, the effected *dissociation* and emerging abstract *signs* allow now for much free play with all three elements.

---

<sup>70</sup> *Recognitions*, too, involved the element of *non-actuality* and were made against other *recognitions* as well as against the background. But this double *dissociation* – of something from the background and, at the same time, not only from another something but also from itself – becomes fully constituted only at this *reflective stage*.

<sup>71</sup> A possible experience of the *distance* coincides with the experience of its increase or diminution, for instance, when somebody unexpectedly formulates an association revealing a deep insight, makes a very clear expression of a thought which seems to be as final and adequate in its revealing content as it is open for future and more specific interpretations. A moment of insight, bringing a sense of communion, diminishes the *distance*, and when the insight is provoked by (or in any other way genuinely *shared* with) another, it diminishes also the *distance* between the persons.

<sup>72</sup> We will encounter *traces* many times, so here let us only observe a close relationship to the Derridean *traces*: an *actual sign* may carry a *trace* of its *origin* and, to this extent, also of its *actual opposite(s)* *dissociated* from the same *nexus*. Typically, *traces* emerge as various relations between the *dissociated* entities. They come always ‘from above’ and are not reducible to the given context where they terminate as *actual signs*. The following is perhaps a bit mystified but nevertheless adequate expression of meaning also of our *traces*: “As rigorously as possible we must permit to appear/disappear the trace of what exceeds the truth of Being. The trace (of that) which can never be presented, the trace which itself can never be presented: that is, appear and manifest itself, as such, in its phenomenon. The trace beyond that which profoundly links fundamental ontology and phenomenology.” [J. Derrida, *Différance*. p.23]

A *sign* is the means of comprising (possibly non-actual) distinctions within the horizon of actuality. *Sign* as a *sign* is, in addition, given as distinct from its meaning and, appearing within the horizon of actuality, most typically makes present something which *transcends* it. Most words provide the examples. “Red” or “perseverance” do not bring in all possible aspects of ‘redness’ or ‘perseverance’. But they do draw enough *distinctions* in the *actual* context to make ‘redness’ or ‘perseverance’ ... well, *actually* present or relevant, to bring them into the *actual* focus. We say, the *signs* *actualise* the respective aspects, they draw the respective *distinctions*. A *sign* is a way of *actually* drawing some (possibly non-actual) *distinctions*, is a form under which such *distinctions* may enter the horizon of actuality. The *distinctions* drawn thus by a *sign* constitute its *meaning*.<sup>73</sup>

*Meaning*, as an expression of the *distance*, is also the trace of *transcendence* (of the signified non-actual or even non-actual with respect to the actuality of the *sign* and abstraction of *sign* as a *sign*). This is illustrated also by the fact that a word whose meaning could be fully analyzed (if there were such a thing) would be redundant. It might function merely as a convenient abstraction, a normative definition, increasing efficiency of the system. The difference between words and ‘mere words’ is exactly this: the latter fail to make anything present, while the former do reveal. The ‘mere words’ turn out to be *signs* which try to ignore the *distance*, and trying that end up without any. But where there is no *distance* there is nothing to reveal either. The power of language seems to lie also in our ability to say – and communicate – something very *distant*, something deeply meaningful which we however do not quite grasp, which we can not make precise. What makes *signs* and words meaningful is the fact that they never embrace the whole (reality) which they intend – they merely hint at it, are mere *signs*, pointers. If you do not understand what is being said, perhaps, you do not know what the talk is about. And if you know, you need not the absolute univocity and precision of the expression – a mere indication, a vague *sign* will suffice.

60. *Meaning* arises in the context of *sign*’s application, in some *actual* situations. Unused *sign* is almost a *contradictio in adiecto*, unless one wants to refer to the potentiality of being used as a *sign* which, however, can be ascribed to every thing. And to be used as a *sign* means to be applied in an *actual* situation to make some *distinctions*, to make a difference. “The arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it.”<sup>74</sup> The context of use usually disambiguates the abstract *signs* making their meaning clear – “Danger!!!” means something different from “Danger?”, and both can mean quite different things depending on the context of usage. A “sweet danger” is so different from a “terrible danger”, that we would never attempt any definite assignment of fixed meanings.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup>The actually drawn *distinctions* comprise quite a lot. “It is sunny” means certainly that it is sunny. However, pronounced on a sunny day to a stranger, it might mean insecurity as to the stranger’s intentions, an attempt to start a conversation. It could mean “Are you interested...? In talking...” These, too, are *distinctions* which the statement may make in the *actual* situation. As hermeneutics never ceased to repeat, the *meaning* of the initial “It is sunny” need not be given uniquely and to the extend it is, it may be as vague as a mere wish to say something. However, a feature very specific to language is that words, written or pronounced, are always already inscribed in the context of inter-human communication and carry their residual meanings independently from any *actual* situation. Thus, whenever encountered, they can hardly fail to produce some *distinctions* beyond the trivial *distinction* of their mere presence (which is a *distinction* made by everything that is).

<sup>74</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:454

<sup>75</sup>This can remind of Wittgenstein’s ‘meaning as use’ and indeed his observations on language are highly relevant to us. (i) “Every *sign* by itself seems dead. *What* gives it life? In use it is alive.” [L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:432] Together with the general idea of language games as pertaining to a specific form of life, we could accept that “the meaning of a piece is its role in the game” [Ibid. I:563], reworded as: the meaning of a word is its place in a life (form). Such a place might be identified with our *distinctions* made when using the word, or better, with the *potential distinctions* which could be made using the word. The ambiguity of “use” as such a *potential* for use versus as a (posited) totality of all *actual* cases of use creates some tension. (ii) Yet, our *signs* arise as the result of the *distance* between the *actuality* and *non-actual* and only lowest, *reflective signs* become *dissociated abstracts* endowed with lasting meaning (potential for use) primarily by convention. This convention, however, is *founded* on the prior *distinctions*. “The agreement, the harmony, of thought and reality consists in this: if I say falsely that something is *red*, even the *red* is what it isn’t.” [Ibid. I:429] For *red* is distinguished anyway and, for instance sensations are also *signs*, although not yet conventional, *dissociated signs*. Words and language constitute only a very specific and limited subset of all *signs*, a subset of conventional *signs*. Although their inter-subjective and conventional structure could hardly sustain without a linguistic community, they could hardly arise and sustain without individuals capable of making *actual distinctions* independently from the use of language, that is, capable of recognising *meaning* through *signs*. “Human conventions are useless if they are not connected with the motives that impel people to observe them.” [S. Weil, *Waiting for God*. The Forms of Implicit Love of God: The love of religious practices; p.121] (iii) There is thus a difference to the extent that Wittgenstein’s ‘use’, embedded in the ‘rules of the language game’, seems opposed to any other form of sedimented ‘meaning’.

Besides the context of application, there is also another aspect of the indeterminacy of sign's meaning. There is no precise border separating definitely the meaning(s) of one word from possible meanings of many other words, and its possibilities of expressing various meanings depend just on where such borders are drawn. The meanings of signs as signs arise as traces of the earlier nexuses of signs and of signification, and this amounts to their inherent interrelations: it is always a system of signs which jointly circumscribes the distinctions effected by any single sign. "Tree" means tree also because "bush" means bush and "wood" means wood – in the absence of these latter words the former would probably mean something slightly different. Words are only signs, that is, tools for actualising distinctions. No distinction comes alone, and neither does any sign. There are no rigid distinctions and things are but their limits. Consequently, not only abstract signs can be associated with different meanings by various conventions, but even meanings themselves can move their boundaries. Neither signs nor abstract signs have any unique and final meanings. The stability of signs reflects mostly only the stability of the corresponding distinctions. But dissociated signs acquire abstract stability, independent from their meaning and thus, the constancy and consistency of words can even strengthen the stability of the signified distinctions.

The turn towards the most specific context of actual usage has an opposite effect tending to 61. dissolve any non-actual sense of signs in general, and of words, in particular. Nevertheless, the specificity of words is that, having been dissociated as signs, they are always signs, they always carry if not a specific meaning, so at least its promise. A word is not a mere string of letters, a completely dissociated, that is, meaningless entity. But it is precisely the dissociation of the event of distinguishing from its content, of 'use' from 'meaning', which makes the one dissociated pole always carry the promise of the other, which makes every word and sentence pregnant with meaning, and every actual meaning dependent on the used words.

Encountering a single word written on a stone in the middle of the woods, I know that it is a sign, perhaps only a joke, but still a sign, a message. This is the dependency characteristic for abstract signs: I understand in general what the word means, it carries some meaning prior to the actual encounter and independently of the context of its use. Only this makes it possible for me to understand something from the written word at all and, possibly, even some more specific intentions of the author.<sup>76</sup> If the written word is "Danger", I will almost for sure look suspiciously around for, on average and for the most "danger" means danger. The world is different from what it would be if the word were "Quiet", or "Abzdangh". The lack of any more specific information about the context and the author makes, perhaps, the message imprecise and unclear, but it remains something understandable (and to misunderstand is, also, to understand). The ultimate specificity of the most immediate contexts, of the actual situations of use may be, indeed, needed to acquire the understanding of the language and the meanings of words. But once the words, the

---

(*"There cannot be a question whether these or other rules are correct ones for the use of «not», (I mean, whether they accord with its meaning.) For without these rules the word has as yet no meaning; and if we change the rules, it now has another meaning."* [L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. 548(b)] One can hardly disagree, if only we read this as saying that the meaning is not reduced to the use/rules but only captured, reflected by them, so that we could say: "Let the use of words teach you their meaning." [Ibid. II:xi], but not that it is their meaning. Indeed, changing the rules of using "not" would change its meaning – but not merely because it would be combined differently with other words, but because it would thus lead to other distinctions whenever used. We are interested exclusively in what is thus captured, while Wittgenstein only in how this capturing happens in language.) Such a disposal with meaning which could be intended beyond or before actual use, is typical for thinking which, encountering the impossibility of any objective fixation of well-defined 'objects' or 'states of affairs' (which, one used to assume, provide the meaning), replaces objectivity with its substitute, socio-cultural relations. As far as the constancy of meaning of conventional signs and inter-subjective verifiability of this constancy is concerned, the association with the rules of use is hardly disputable. But as an explanation, or even a mere suggestion of the meaning actually carried by the signs, it must refer to deeper, not only extra-linguistic but also extra-social aspects (which indeed happens in *Philosophical Investigations*, for instance, 'life form', 'image').) Our meanings are the possible and effected distinctions – distinctions of a communication process which is neither founded in nor exhausted by the linguistic interaction. Only sedimentation of meanings and their constancy in the abstract signs of language are aspects relative to a community (which we do not really address). We can nevertheless observe the close correlation (even equipollence) of 'use' and 'meaning', if we view them as the result of dissociating the two aspects of distinction: the fact or event of distinguishing (corresponding to the pragmatics of 'use', the illocutionary force of Austin's, or speaker-meaning of Grice) and the effected distinction (corresponding to actual meaning, locutionary content or sentence-meaning). Recognising this close kinship, the origin in the common nexus, we are far from reducing any aspect to the other.

<sup>76</sup>Of course, the two need not agree, and one can often encounter words one knows used in a (at least slightly) new meaning. But that encountered words are messages from other humans is as obvious as it is fundamental; even if no recipient were ever intended, an author has been there and this is a part of the meaning of every text.

abstract signs acquired some meaning, they will carry it in relative independence from the context of use. "May we not, for example, be affected with the promise of a good thing, though we have not an idea of what it is? Or is not the being threatened with danger sufficient to excite a dread, though we think not of any particular evil likely to befall us, nor yet frame to ourselves an idea of danger in abstract?"<sup>77</sup>

Meaning, in an actual use of an abstract sign, may involve all aspects of the actual situation. If I suspect that you want to cheat on me, the meaning of your "Danger!" may include my theories about the possible ways of you cheating on me by saying just that. Thus, (almost) every situation of using a sign results in some meaning which, being dependent on the context, is unique. Such an extreme nominalism forgets, however, that the possibility of using a sign in a given situation is conditioned by its meaning prior to this situation. "Here one might speak of a 'primary' and 'secondary' sense of a word. It is only if the word has the primary sense for you that you use it in the secondary one."<sup>78</sup> One can scream "Danger!" as a joke or to cheat others, i.e., use the expression for purposes which, for the most, do not go well with its meaning. But one could make such a joke *only because* "danger" means something prior to its actual usage. Thus, the meaning of a sign has a twofold aspect: on the one hand, every actual use effecting some particular distinctions in a given context and, on the other hand, the potential for making various distinctions in various contexts, a floating and eventually undefinable kernel (in empiricist's terms: a family resemblance) with which some philosophers would like to endow each sign in its dissociation from the rest of the world or the language. The ability – and purposefulness – of such an endowment depend only on the degree of the attempted dissociation and may vary from quite useful ones (like in the dictionaries), to hardly plausible postulates of some metaphysical relation between an abstract sign and its meaning.

62. There are much more signs than there are words, and much more distinctions than signs. We are sceptical to all forms of reductionism and we are not interested in signs as such, let alone abstract signs. We will therefore stick to the just mentioned disquotational schema of meaning which simply says that meaning of the linguistic signs is, typically, not determined and not definable by purely linguistic means. The meaning of a word, the distinctions it can actualise, transcend usually possibilities of the language simply because they are of non-linguistic kind. To know the meaning of "blue", no amount of linguistic or other explanations will ever suffice. One just has to know what blue is. That its use will be related to and mutually dependent on the use of "green", "red", etc. is only a reflection of the fact that blue is distinguished relatively to green, red and other colors. "Horse – what it is like, everybody can see." said one version of Larousse dictionary. Uninformative as this may be, it is perfectly sufficient with respect to most trivialities. One might think that the story with trivialities like "blue" and "horse", for which we have obvious, immediately given distinctions of other than linguistic kind which this words signify, does not generalise. But why should the story with any other words, like "perseverance", "hate", "eternity",... be any different? Because one assumes that the only reality is *hic et nunc*, is the pure actuality and everything which extends beyond its horizon is something mental, uncertain, suspicious. We have already started to oppose this assumption and will continue doing so. There is a difference between the way in which "blue" means blue and "hate" means hate. But this difference is simply the difference between blue and hate. The shortest distance separating hate from an actual pronouncement of "hate" is incommensurably longer than the longest distance possibly separating an instance of blue from the actually spoken word "blue". We will have more to say about this difference, especially, in Book II, which could hardly ever be characterised by lengthy comparisons of possible and impossible contexts of usage of the words "blue" and "hate".
63. Reflection externalising its contents gives rise to signs as signs, to the distance separating actuality of the sign from the drawn distinctions. The dissociation of the nexuses of sign and the

<sup>77</sup>G. Berkeley, *A Treatise....* Introduction §20. Here lies a difference from most approaches addressing the issue of the genesis of linguistic meaning. Fluctuations of use may provide basis for the subtleties and variations of the meaning, but this process of constitution does not change the fact that some residual, even if undefinable meanings of most words are being constituted – most people do have an idea of what "Danger" written on the stone could mean, irrespectively of the fact that it might have been meant in different ways. For us, the issue of language is not so much that of how it possibly might have arisen in the human history and how it possibly may function in the society but, primarily, how it is encountered by an individual. In this respect, it certainly has an element of 'givenness', of some meanings which are encountered and not constituted.

<sup>78</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. II:xii

more primordial signification results in at least three elements: a *sign* (which has now become abstract), its *meaning* – the *distinctions* it actualises (or, in general vagueness, which it possibly can actualise), and the *actual situation*, the background of the addressed *distinctions*. *Reflection* might be now taken simply as the sphere allowing these three *aspects* to function in a relative independence.

This independence is embodied in the structure of ‘as’ (and is related to the abstract or conventional character of the new level.) ‘As’ in *sign as a sign* signals the *dissociation* of *sign* from what it signifies (the *object of reflection*, 4.2). But it comes in various concrete forms. Seeing something *as* something, *x* as *y*, is founded in the fact that *x* has been *dissociated* from its *actual presentation* and, on other occasions, could also be seen as something else. In the deepest sense, ‘as’ is a *reflection* of a variety of ‘aspects’ of one *nexus*. One can view love ‘as’ enslavement and ‘as’ liberation, friendship ‘as’ obligation and ‘as’ gratification and ‘as’... It is no coincidence that all such ‘aspects’, contrary as they might appear, are joined by “and” which represents the fact that they are only possible *actual manifestations* of a unitary *nexus*. In more mundane examples,

one can see a duck-rabbit drawing ‘as’ a duck or ‘as’ a rabbit<sup>79</sup>, one can see the drawing  ‘as’ a glass cube or ‘as’ a solid angle or ‘as’ a wire frame or... (And, of course, the context, the background against which the drawing appears, can contribute significantly to how one will see it.) Here we notice the difference: various ‘as...’ are now joined by “or” for, indeed, one cannot see it as *both* glass cube and solid angle. This difference signals a new status acquired by a *sign*. In a sense, it has become itself an object, it has become independent from its signification and can now represent different objects, depending only on ‘as’ *what* one sees it. It is this *dissociation*, where not only one *nexus* happens to have different aspects and *actual manifestations*, but where also one *sign* can represent different objects, which marks sharply the level of *reflective representation*.

### Distinctions in the (same) indistinct

Just to anticipate a possible worry which we will address in more details in the last section of this 64. Book, in particular, 6.3.

*Signs* are *actual tokens* of *distinctions* – *distinctions* which are drawn and made *in the current situation, in the world but, eventually, in the same indistinct*. Every *distinction* makes a *distinction* in the *indistinct*, and so does (*meaning of*) every *sign*. There is nothing peculiarly ‘mental’ about the meanings of *signs*.<sup>80</sup> Meanings typically *transcend* the *horizon of actuality* and, in any case, may remain fully *external*. Hearing you saying “There is a danger around the corner!” changes the *actual situation*, makes a difference. It does not happen ‘only in my head’ – it modifies the world in which I actually am. (Of course, it does not modify it ‘physically’, but the material, physical things constitute only a minor element of the world which only seldom concerns us.) In this sense every linguistic *sign*, every utterance, is a true ‘speech act’: it effects some *distinctions* in the matter of the world.

Asking “How does a thought act?” Frege gives the immediate answer: “By being apprehended and taken to be true.”<sup>81</sup> *Distinction*, we could say, acts by merely being apprehended, although this would here mean simply effecting some *distinction*. (And as we have remarked several times, often the mere fact of a triviality being uttered, introduces *distinctions* far beyond the mere fact of the utterance.) *Distinction* can not be *dissociated* from its meaning because every *distinction* is its own meaning, is a *distinction* only in so far as it makes a difference, even if no practical and observable consequences follow. A *sign*, and in any case a *sign as a sign*, has its being independent from its possible *meanings*, but it is a *sign* only to the degree in which it effects some *distinctions*, i.e., has some *meaning*.

This crucial point seems to go counter much of common-sense but, at the bottom, it complies with it. *Recognition* of a *sign’s meaning* is not something which happens ‘in my head’ as opposed to some mysterious ‘reality outside’: a *sign* is a *sign* only to the extent it is *recognised*, and its *recognition* amounts to drawing some *distinctions*. And *distinctions* are not something ‘in my head’ but in the world, eventually, in the *indistinct*. The *meaning* of the exclamation “There is a danger around the corner!” is the set of *distinctions* it draws, the way it changes the world.

<sup>79</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* II:xii

<sup>80</sup>We do not know what “mental” means, unless it is, perhaps, just the meanings of *signs*.

<sup>81</sup>G. Frege, *The thought: a logical inquiry*.

*Sign* is not any copy of anything, and neither is its meaning. *Sign* is originally an *actual aspect* of a wider experience and, eventually, of the whole experience. Its *meaning* is not any picture one carries and can recreate ‘in one’s head’ – it is the way in which it can affect the world, a set of *distinctions* carved, eventually as all *distinctions*, in the *indistinct*.

What kind of *distinctions* a *sign* effects, and if they are sufficient for, say, me deciding to act according to them is a completely another question. It may not draw them in the final and sufficiently definitive way. Hearing about the danger around the corner, I may wish some further *distinctions* to be made which should carve the world along the same lines. To be convinced that there is *actually* a danger, I may need more information, perhaps, to know whence you know it, what danger it is, perhaps, to *actually* see it myself. All such steps are but collecting the *distinctions* which may or may not modify the world in the same way as the original announcement did. At some point, I may indeed stop further verification and conclude that what you said was true. If there were no distinction between meaning and using, I could hardly wonder about that – at most, I could wonder what you mean by saying “Danger!” when I see none. But truth, although itself an adventure of meaning, is a further story, which we postpone for the moment (II:2.2.3.ii).<sup>82</sup>

## 4.2 Subject-object

65. To *externalise* means to objectify. And vice versa, to *dissociate* an *object* means to posit it as distinct from the *positing consciousness*, as *external*. *Externality* is what constitutes an *object* in the strict sense. *Recognitions* of awareness contain the germ of this *externality* since they appear through *signs*, involving an element of *non-actuality* or *non-actuality*. But it is only when I pause to reflectively consider an *object*, when it is pulled out of the horizon of experience and enclosed within the *horizon of actuality*, that it appears as an *external* totality. Objects of awareness, of experience, are not *external* in this strong sense; they are *distinguished* but their *non-actuality* is only a germ of *externality*. In this strict sense, an *object* is only an object of reflection and only reflective being is confronted with *objects*.

Since *externalisation* involves double *dissociation*, §57, in particular, the *dissociation* of its *object* from itself, the respective *sign* as a *sign* has also more definite direction towards its *object* than it was the case before. *Distinctions* and *signs* of *recognitions* referred primarily to the background. A *sign of reflection*, appearing as a *sign*, is by the same token explicitly directed

---

<sup>82</sup>If this looks like a repetition of Wittgenstein’s “language is a tool”, then it probably is. Wittgenstein seems happy with the fact that the tool works and analyses *how* it happens. The question one might ask is: *what* makes the tool work? The question could be declared illegitimate if the tool were inherent part of the game but, as it seems, humankind played the game once without it and, moreover, every baby begins to play it without. *What* makes it possible to include language into the whole game, to turn game into a language-game? It seems to be the fact that words do have *meanings* and that these *meanings* get woven into the rest of *distinctions*, i.e., both are *distinctions* in the same matter of life. Putting no more (and perhaps less) charity than necessary into the reading of the private language argument (*if* such an argument was given and *if* it was an argument – we leave clarifications to scholars), it says: a solipsistic subject could not possibly maintain any reliable criteria of correct usage of his *dissociated signs*, of the consistency in obeying conventions of their usage. Why not? Because the only reliable criteria, if any, of following a rule are other players. We can accept critique of ‘mental states’ and *dissociated sensations* but have problems with understanding why seeing Eiffel Tower twice, one needs any conventions to recognise it as one and the same. If this can happen, one should be also able to associate with these two *experiences* the same abstract sign, say, “Eiffel Tower” (or #!\*), and use it consistently. (Of course, our whole development suggests that we maintain the possibility of an individual to actually *establish the very relation* sign-signified, not only to utilise such a relation established socially for defining new and private special cases of it.) Sure, private convention is not public convention and no social verification of correctness can be ensured. But, although public verification often *may* be more reliable, at bottom it is neither better nor different than one’s private ability to *recognise* Eiffel Tower for the third time as “Eiffel Tower” (or #!\*). Language is essentially social in that it accumulates sedimented meanings with which each individual is confronted. But if one did not have the private ability to establish the relation of *meaning*, the mere rules of use could hardly guarantee anything of significance except, perhaps, a general consensus. (Such a consensus maintains only the sedimented *meanings*.) This private ability with respect to most *actual experiences* and *signs* is *founded* in the deeper layer of *signs* and *recognitions* which are not *dissociated* as abstract signs are. Eventually, private consistency can be maintained because *existence* is not a solipsistic subject in need of some ‘internal’ verification criteria but, on the contrary, is *confronted* with something it is not, whence criteria for lower levels arise from the higher ones. (The possibility of imagining, after Max Scheler, a ‘lifelong Crusoe’, who grows up alone and nevertheless establishes and uses consistently a system of private signs, seems to be a critique of the ‘argument’, e.g., in G. P. Baker, P. M. S. Hacker, *Malcolm on language and rules*. But if we were willing to see the ‘argument’ as directed against solipsism in general, not only against linguistic solipsism (e.g., N. Malcolm, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations*), there need not be any genuine conflict between these two interpretation schools.)

towards an external object. *Object* is more sharply distinguished from its background than it was in recognition; *sign as a sign* focuses more sharply on its *object* than a simple *sign* does.

*Objectivity*, like most other things, is a matter of degree. In this Book, we are drawing *distinctions* 66 separating different levels of ontological *founding*. Different levels mark, indeed, distinctions in nature. But the distinction in nature between levels is but a distinction of degree which has been drawn so far, which has been so intensified, that it caused emergence of new aspects. Thus, for instance, there is a distinction in nature between *recognition* and *representation*, in that the latter introduces *signs* which are no longer mere *signs* but are *signs as signs* (we may say, not only natural but also abstract *signs*). Yet, awareness is a nucleus from which *reflection* develops by a process of further differentiation. In this sense, they are on the same, continuous line, on the same trace, and all differences are only differences of degree.

This applies also to *objectivity*. There are degrees of being an *object*, that is, degrees of the potentiality for being captured as a *sign* within the *horizon of actuality*. This pen here can easily be pointed at and made into an *object*. ‘The whole world’ can, too, be *posed* as an *object* of *reflection*, but we feel easily that there is a significant difference between the two. I can isolate myself as an independent entity, as an *objective* totality and think of my, then only *external*, relations to the world and other people. I can then also think about ‘my time’, the time of my life, as different, perhaps, even independent from the time of others. But doing this I know immediately that it is not the whole truth about myself, that the isolation went too far, and that this being I have just objectified stands in more intimate relations to its surroundings than those I can discover treating myself as an *objective* entity.

*Objects* are sharply distinguished, *externalised* contents. This sharp *precision* is possible due to the 67. dissociation of an *object*, the fact that it is entirely inscribed within the *horizon of actuality* from which it has suppressed all competitors. The fact that *objects* carry with themselves the aspect of *non-actuality* escapes easily *reflection* and appears for it only as the fact of their *externality*. *Externality* is the distance separating *reflection* from its *object*, which is just another side of the distance separating it from its origin. *Reflection* is a mode of perception and understanding, a hypostasis of being, farthest removed from the *virtuality* of the original *nothingness*.

As contents become more precisely dissociated from their background and turn, eventually, into 68. objects of *actual reflection*, so does emerge their counterpart within the unity of *horizon of actuality*, the *actual subject*. The inseparable relation of *subject-object*, always thought in terms of pure *actuality*, is an event of *reflection*: an isolated, purely *actual object* and equally *actual*, instantaneous *subject* – this is how the tradition, whether its idealistic, rationalistic or empirical branch, used to see it. Of course, in order to obtain a purely *actual subject* which, nevertheless, has something to do with at least a shadow of the real world, one has to invent a lot of transcendental machinery, constitutions, and what-not. And, on the other hand, starting with a purely *actual objects* which, nevertheless, should appear for at least a shadow of a real being, one has to perform a lot of constructions, sensations, associations, amalgamations, juxtapositions, shortly – desperate, even if ingenious sewing, before one is forced to unwillingly give up.

For us, the *objects* are the final hypostases, the *actual* limits (usually, only provisional and never necessary) of a process of *distinguishing*.<sup>83</sup> Some of these *objects* fit better into our sensuous and perceptual capacities, into our scope of *horizon of actuality*, and these are the most common *objects*. Others do not fit equally well, always immediately announcing the inadequacy and insufficiency of the *objective representation*, and these are termed more “*subjective*”. In either case, the *actual subject* is nothing more than the fact of the *reflective sign* appearing as a *sign*, of its non-coincidence with the signified experience – *actual subject* is the place, or better, the event of this ‘non-coincidence’.

As in §47, p. 20, the distance separating *object* from *subject* is the same as the distance separating 69. *subject* from *object* (as we will see in 4.3.§74, *before* is the same relation as *after*). The sharper separation of the *object*, the sharper separation of the *subject*; the more *external*, independent the former becomes, the more precisely and definitely the latter is delineated from the background of experience. The two are *equipollent aspects of reflection*.

And yet, the *equipollence* of awareness and *self-awareness* does not go over into the *equipollence*

---

<sup>83</sup>Virtually the same idea – that *objects* are results of objectification relative to the existence – can be found in N. Berdyaev, *I and the world of objects*, in particular, II.

of reflection and self-reflection. Further dissociation has taken place and self-reflection is no longer a necessary aspect of the actual subject. In fact, reflection and self-reflection are incommensurable because they represent two different acts which are hardly ever performed jointly. Actual subject is directed exclusively towards the actual object, it is exhausted within the horizon of actuality. “The mark of the mind is that there do not arise more acts of knowledge than one at a time.” Reflection is continually focused on its objects, in spite of their externality it almost ‘identifies’ itself with them. In this process, that is, in the series of reflective acts, self-reflection can (although it seldom does) arise as one of them. Limited to the horizon of actuality, reflection can occupy itself with the objects only to the extent it forgets itself, only to the extent it does not reflect over itself. Reflection forgets itself and in order to catch a glimpse of the self-awareness which underlies its fascination with the objects, it has to actively gather itself to perform another act, an act of self-reflection. This is the site of infinite regress. The ‘I’ objectified in an act of self-reflection, being an object, is always distinct from the reflecting subject. To make the two coincide, one has to posit an infinite chain of such acts and claim the existence of the fix point obtained as its ideal limit.<sup>84</sup> This ideal construction is as much as reflective dissociation can do to re-construct the intuited unity of awareness and self-awareness.

Thus, although object and subject are equipollent aspects of a reflective experience, reflection and self-reflection are not such aspects – they are two different modifications of a reflective act. If they ever find place together, in a simultaneity of the horizon of actuality, this can happen only by a considerable effort of will and attention.

70. Externality has nothing to do with spatiality. It is just an aspect of subjectivity, of reflection which is aware of the distance separating it from its object. If my reflection chooses as its object my sensation of pain, a particular memory, a particular feeling, these will appear as external in the same sense as other objects. Thus understood, externality is opposed to something like ‘internality’, to that which has not been dissociated as an independent object. What this ‘internality’ comprises is a perplexing question because any answer proposed by reflection posits immediately an external object. By opposition to objectivity, one terms it “subjective”. We will return to this opposition, but for the moment it should be admissible to see ‘inner’ life in the flux of experience, of heterogenous distinctions and recognitions, but only as long as one lets them flow, only as long as one does not isolate them as independent objects. In the moment one does it, they leave one’s ‘interior’ and appear as external, even if not spatial, objects.

### 4.3 Time and space

Externality is something different from the three-dimensional extensionality, and time of the objects and their changes (not to mention temporality of the flow of experience) is different from the linear and objective time. Yet they are both aspects of the nexus of subjectivity-objectivity. Also, they are steps in the process of emergence of the eventual objective time and space and we will now follow this process.

The spatio-temporality from 3.2 involved merely the distinction between the simultaneous aspects of actuality and non-actuality. Representation, the reflective repetition, dissociating an object, establishes its identity. As an experienced identity it underlies the emerging experience of time and space. As the identity pushed to its ideal limit of the residual point (or ‘substance’), it gives also rise to the abstract (‘objective’) structure of both aspects: linearity of time and homogenous space. Let us consider the former aspect first.

#### 4.3.1. Time

71. Reflection comes always ‘too late’, it represents something which ‘has already been’ recognised in the flux of experience. And as any act involves its whole structure within itself, no additional step is needed to establish the experience of ‘after’ – it is the distance separating the representing sign from what it represents. It does not matter that, objectively speaking, this distance may take time 0 (if such a thing exists ???). It is there, in the structure of the reflective experience and

---

<sup>84</sup>After  $\omega$  iterations of that-ing one gets to the point ' $f = \text{that}_1(\text{that}_2(\text{that}_3(\dots))$ ', i.e., a fix point where no more that's add anything new, so that  $\text{that}(f) = f$ . Knaster-Tarski theorem is a mathematical reflection of this coincidence, specifying also simple conditions on the operation (here, that-ing) under which  $\omega$  iterations indeed yield a fix point.

hence also in the experience itself: reflection repeats what it reflects, and this basic repetition is the same as the primordial after.<sup>85</sup>

This reflective after is not that of one actuality coming after another. We are still ‘within’ the scope of the *horizon of actuality*, where the first after finds its place. We can view it simply as the Husserlian retention, as the *primäre, frische Erinnerung*. The withdrawal of the just-perceived-object into the immediate past amounts just to the impossibility of actually grasping and retaining the object in the unity of the reflective act.

The after is the distinction between the *actual sign* and the signified thing which it dissociates and after which it comes. After is the trace of the *nexus* of experience which has been dissociated into the objective content and subjective sign – after is the distance between the two. This is also the distance separating the ever fleeting ‘now’ from reflection which always comes after it. This distance is experienced simultaneously with the poles it dissociates, all elements of the relation after are experienced simultaneously within the *horizon of actuality*. The experience dissociated by reflection plays for it the role of simultaneous, immediately present virtuality. Its withdrawal into the background, effected by the reflective representation, establishes the after which from now on permeates the whole life of reflection.

We only want to claim that this event is not something that merely happens to reflective consciousness, but is one of its constitutive aspects. (Ideally, its description should be free from references to the passing time because it is what constitutes the very experience of time.) Reflective experience is equipollent with the experience of time. The more definitely reflection approaches dissociation, the more ‘objective’ becomes the time of the experience.

James, speaking as always only in terms of *actual experiences* “explained the continuous identity 72. of each personal consciousness as a name for the practical fact that new experiences come which look back on the old ones, find them ‘warm’, and greet and appropriate them as ‘mine’. The pen, realised in this retrospective [reflective] way as my percept, thus figures as a fact of ‘conscious’ life. But it does so only so far as ‘appropriation’ has occurred; and appropriation is *part of the content of a later experience* wholly additional to the original ‘pure’ pen.”<sup>86</sup> Such ‘appropriations’, pragmatically or phenomenologically convincing as they may be, can be used for explaining the emergence of a *conscious ego*, which “is a part of the content of the world experienced”<sup>87</sup> and which indeed seems the only form of personal unity pragmatism is capable to account for. But since such ‘appropriations’ are *actual experiences* and the whole explanation happens from the perspective of *actuality*, it must need to presuppose continuity in time, or as we would say in temporality, which is more primordial than any contents of *actual experiences*. Such continuity does not pertain to the *actual subject* except, perhaps, for the experiences of ‘appropriations’. Continuity in time is founded in the sphere of experience preceding time, and reflection finds itself always perplexed by this continuity, since it is irresistibly separated from itself, as it is from its object, by the after.<sup>88</sup>

The ‘pure past’, the past which not only isn’t merely a collection of past actualities, but which even never had been an *actuality*, is the way in which the horizon of experience can be thought by the attentive reflection.<sup>89</sup> Experience is inaccessible to reflection and this inaccessibility finds its very clear expression in *after*. Any act of attentive reflection is immediately self-aware of having 73.

<sup>85</sup> We are playing here on the possible (and intended) conflation of the proposed notion of *reflection* and reflection in the more common sense of the word. As suggested in §51, the two are almost the same – they have no structural differences but the difference of degree.

<sup>86</sup> W. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. IV:2;p.129

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. VI:footnote;p.168

<sup>88</sup> We are not trying to counter James’ excellent, often phenomenological, descriptions. But they cannot suffice when we do not believe that everything can be reduced to and explained in terms of *actual experiences*. For instance, one of the first conditions for ‘new experiences coming and looking back on the old ones’ is “that the new experience has past time for its ‘content’, and in that time a pen [or whatever] that ‘was’.” [Ibid. IV:2;p.129] Adequate as it is, it does assume ‘past’ which is given in experience. Indeed, it is. One can rest satisfied with that, with describing “what can be experienced at *some definite time* by some experient [...] in some concrete kind of experience that can be *definitely* pointed out.” [Ibid. VI;p.160; my emphasis] But we do not believe that everything can be found in such ‘definite’ moments.

<sup>89</sup> “This table bears traces of my past life, for I have carved my initials on it and spilt ink on it. But these traces in themselves do not refer to the past: they are present; and, in so far as I find in them signs of some ‘previous’ event, it is because I derive my sense of the past from elsewhere, because I carry this particular significance within myself.” [M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. III:2] Bergson is probably the source from which Merleau-Ponty borrows the idea which later appears also in J. Derrida, *Différance*.

arrived at the scene after its *object*. But this *after* is merely an expression of the change of level, of the *distance* separating *reflection* from the *experience* which never has been, and never will be, reduced to *reflective actuality*. One has to emphasise the ‘purity’ in the expressions like “pure past” exactly in order not to confuse it with a collection of other, though now past, *actualities*. *Experience* is not a collection, not even a *totality* of experiences; it is what precedes experiences and makes them possible. Preceding the differentiation into experiences, it also precedes time understood as succession, in particular, the possibility of past experiences, of *actualities* which are not *actual* now but were so some other time. Past thought of as past *actuality* is founded upon the experienced duration and the transition from this experience to *reflection*. This foundation remains around *reflection* as the ‘pure past’, which alone makes it possible for *actual experiences* to recede into past and thus turn into past *actualities*.

74. This, we could say, establishes perhaps the dimension of the past, but what about the future? The future is, at least at this level, no different from the past. *After*, as the trace of the *dissociated nexus of experience*, as the relation connecting the *actually given object* and the background from which it emerged (or its *equipollent aspects*: the *subjective sign* and the *objective content*), is asymmetric and is experienced as such. The *actual sign* is *distinct* from what it signifies and, furthermore, it comes *after*. The *actuality*, this “strange crest of the time series”<sup>90</sup>, appears as the point into which all *experience* converges, to use Bergson’s image, as the tip of the cone of the whole past. This *after* means not only the *distance* separating the *reflective sign* from the *experience* but also its *impassability* – *reflection* can never re-capture the *experience*, because it always comes “post factum”. This asymmetry gives the time arrow its direction.

The rest is uniformity by analogy – *after* is asymmetric: 1) *objects* are what is experienced through the *actual signs of reflection* which involves them in the relation *after*, but 2) *after is the same* relation as *before* – *reflection* coming *after x* means the same as *x* coming *before reflection*; 3) in a sense, *reflection* is the future of its *object* which is always past and after which it arrives; more abstractly, 4) future – and now it is the future of *reflection!* – is just what is *after the actual reflection*. It is to the *actual sign*, what this *sign* is to what it signifies, i.e., just like ‘now’ of *reflection* is *after* what it signifies, future is *after now* of the *reflection* – it is a point of *reflection* over the *actual experience* or, as the case may be with an *attentive reflection*, the point of *reflection* over *actual reflection*.

This future which lies *before* is, of course, indeterminate, unlike the past *after* which *reflection* relates to a particular, definite experience. Past is something *actually reflected* and in this lies its definite, determined character. Future, established by mere analogy, has only the character of potentiality, of a possible *reflection*, it is a *reflection* which has not happened yet. This analogy by asymmetry determines the dimension of the future. It can be found in the *immediacy* of an *act* in the form of protention, *anschauliche Erwartung*, which presents (an aspect of) the *object* in some definite (as expected) form augmented, however, with a sign of indeterminacy, the possibility of unfulfilment, or else protention which anticipates the *immediate action*, like the electric potential which can be measured over the entire scalp a fraction of a second before a finger movement which one has already decided to perform. But future is not limited to the (affectively presented) *immediacy* of expectation. It can be found in the general sense of openness of the future of one’s life and, eventually, in the abstract ‘future of the world’ in the objective time.

#### 4.3.1.i. Objective time

75. We have thus entered the dimension of *temporality*. But so far, *temporality* is not yet the objective time – it has the dimensions of *actuality*, *after* and *before*, that is, of present, past and future, but these are, so to speak, subjectively localised, centered around the *here-and-now*, which has become ‘now’. Also, we have not established a uniform, global time. There may still be many different futures as there may be many different pasts and they may be only loosely (if at all) connected with each other. Even if they all pass through the unique ‘now’, *temporality* still allows multiplicity of time paths.

*Temporality* is objective in the sense of being an aspect of the experience of *externalised objects*, but it isn’t yet the objective time *dissociated* from subjectivity and its apprehension of things. It is still time of an experience of *objects*, that is, still *temporality* with a designated

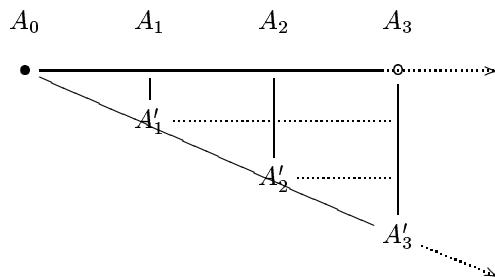
---

<sup>90</sup>E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. B:2.§26

actuality, “the present time” of here-and-now. It shouldn’t sound too implausible, if we said that such a temporality pertains to any being which has reached the level of discerning independent objects. A dog bringing me a ball and looking expectantly into my eyes, waiting for me to throw it away is, too, involved into temporality, just as it is when looking in the bushes for the ball just thrown.

Husserl describes two kinds of time consciousness: the consciousness of time as it unfolds in the *actual experience* along the axis of retentions and protentions, and another, *uneigentliches Zeitbewußtsein*, which relates to the time of remote past and of lifeless recollections. “We could say: temporality stands against the inauthentic representation of time, of infinite time, time and time relations which are not recognised in experience.”<sup>91</sup> The dichotomy is quite significant, so let us summarise briefly the main points.

The former is the time of immediate presence, of the *actual*, fresh retention (*primäre Erinnerung*) and the equally *actual* protention, the expectation of the immediate continuation (*anschauliche Erwartung*). The retention is aptly illustrated by the famous figure:



$A_0$  marks the initial point of the *actual experience*, the *Urimpression* of, say, an object  $A$ . The horizontal line indicates the objective time in which the object may undergo some continuous changes, indicated by the points  $A_1, A_2, A_3$ . (The discrete points are, of course, only means of suggesting the genuine continuity of the process.)  $A'_1$  represents the *actual impression* of  $A$  at the time-point 1,  $A'_2$  at the time-point 2. The point 3 may here represent the idealised *immediacy* of ‘now’ in which the impression  $A'_3$  corresponds to the actual appearance of the object  $A_3$ . The whole idea is that this impression relates not only to the *immediacy* of the object,  $A_3$ , but also to its immediate past. In a sense, it keeps and contains the whole line  $A_0 - A'_3$  with the intermediary impression-points  $A'_1, A'_2$ , etc., as indicated by the horizontal dotted lines. The same happens at  $A'_2$ , which keeps and contains the past  $A'_1$ , etc., so that “each passing now retains retentionally all earlier layers.”<sup>92</sup>

But now, there is also “inauthentic consciousness of time: a part of a perceived melody drained off a longer time ago.”<sup>93</sup> “We say, that of which I am retentionally conscious is absolutely certain. How does it now stand with remoter past?”<sup>94</sup> Analysing a continuous experience, like that of listening to a melody, one may still keep, towards its end, some living memory of its beginning, so that

<sup>91</sup> E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. A:I.1 §6 «Wir können auch sagen: der Zeitanschauung steht gegenüber die uneigentliche Zeitvorstellung, die Vorstellung der unendlichen Zeit, der Zeiten und Zeitverhältnisse, die nicht anschaulich realisiert sind.»

<sup>92</sup> E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. A:II. Beilage vi. «Jedes vergangene Jetzt birgt retential in sich alle früheren Stufen.» Some 15 years earlier James makes essentially the same observations: “If recently the brain-tract  $a$  was vividly excited, and then  $b$ , and now vividly  $c$ , the total present consciousness is not produced simply by  $c$ 's excitement, but also by the dying vibrations of  $a$  and  $b$  as well. If we want to represent the brain-process we must write it thus:  $a b c \dots$ ” [W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*. I:9.3] In a footnote, he remarks, concerning not only the retential impressions, but the unity of a ‘now’ circumscribed by a horizon of gradually dissolving clarity: “The most explicit acknowledgment I have anywhere found of all this is in a buried and forgotten paper by the Rev. Jas. Wills, on *Accidental Association*, in the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. XXI, part I (1846). Mr. Wills writes: At every instant of conscious thought there is a certain sum of perceptions, or reflections, or both together, present, and together constituting one whole state of apprehension. Of this some definite portion may be far more distinct than all the rest; and the rest be in consequence proportionably vague, even to the limit of obliteration. But still, within this limit, the most dim shade of perception enters into, and in some infinitesimal degree modifies, the whole existing state.”

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. B:II. §27. «Uneigentliches Zeitbewußtsein: vor längerer Zeit abgeflossene Teile einer wahrgenommenen Melodie.»

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. A:I.2. §22. «Was ich retential bewußt habe, so sahen wir, das ist absolut gewiß. Wie steht es nun mit der ferneren Vergangenheit?»

“when I re-enact [the tone] *c, d*, this reproductive representation of succession finds its fulfillment in the yet living earlier succession.”<sup>95</sup> But consciousness of time stretches much further than that. Attentatively, we usually recall things which are not in any *actually* recognisable (*anschaulich*) continuity with the ‘now’. Such a recollection intends the original (now past) ‘now’ of the recollected experience or object and is possible “thereby that against the flux of temporal withdrawal and of modifications of consciousness, there remains the object in its absolute apperceptive identity even as it appears to withdraw, the object actually experienced as ‘this’. [...] It belongs to the essence of the modifying flux that this time point remains necessarily identical. The ‘now’ as the actual ‘now’ is the givenness of the actuality of a time point. As the phenomenon retires into the past, this ‘now’ retains the character of a past ‘now’, but it remains the same ‘now’, only that it emerges in the relation to the actual ‘now’ and temporary new ‘now’ as past.”<sup>96</sup>

In addition to this externality, objectified identity of single objects, one last element seems indispensable to constitute the consciousness of the fully uniform and homogenous time of the objective world. “For the emergence of this time consciousness, reproductive recollection (intuitive as well as in the form of empty intentions) plays important role.”<sup>97</sup> “Only in recollection I can re-enact an identical time object, and I can also state in remembrance that what was earlier perceived is the same as what is later recollected.”<sup>98</sup> The reproductive recollection does not have the capacity to *actually* bring the original object or experience to life (*Anschauung*). It can only intend it, as if *positing* the objective identity across the time which broke the continuity of the experience of the object. Thus, the flow of time becomes a rather abstract succession of time-points which can be imagined as extending indefinitely. “The reproduced time field reaches farther than the *actual*. If we pick there a past point, the reproduction yields, through an overlap with the time field in which this point was ‘now’, further withdrawal into the past, and so on. This process is obviously to be thought as unlimited, although the actual recollection fails in practice.”<sup>99</sup>

78. We are far from questioning the ingenuity and adequacy of these phenomenological descriptions of both (or rather, as can be gathered even from the few included quotations, of several) levels/kinds of time experience. An *actual* object or event retires gradually into the past, dissolving eventually in the horizon, that is, *disappearing beyond the horizon of actuality*. Once that happened, we can no longer make it *actually* alive; we can only reproduce it, as if recalling it from beyond the grave. This broken continuity makes the two kinds of experiences so fundamentally different that one might perhaps legitimately ask what makes them both experiences of the same time? What does the time of retentional *actuality* and fresh remembrance have to do with the time of remote, dead and only revived recollections?

The persisting identity of an *object* may help to understand the continuous uniformity of the objective time but not its unity with the time of *immediate* experience. Husserl answers the question by referring to the double intentionality of time consciousness which, at every point, intends not only its (lasting, changing or even disappearing) object but also the very experience of this object. “It belongs to the essence of the phenomenological situation that each past can be transformed reproducitively into a reproducing ‘now’, which itself has some past. This is the phenomenological foundation of all laws of time.”<sup>100</sup> “We have in the flow of consciousness double

---

<sup>95</sup>Ibid. «Wenn ich wiederhole [Tone] *c, d*, so findet diese reproduktive Vorstellung der Sukzession ihre Erfüllung in der noch eben lebendigen früheren Sukzession.»

<sup>96</sup>Ibid. A:I.2.§31. «dadurch, daß gegenüber dem Fluß der zeitlichen Zurückschiebung, dem Fluß von Bewußtsein-modifikationen, das Objekt, das zurückgeschoben erscheint, eben in absoluter Identität apperzeptiv erhalten bleibt, und zwar das Objekt mitsamt der im Jetzpunkt erfahrenen Setzung als ‘dies’. [...] Zum Wesen des modifizierenden Flusses gehört es, daß diese Zeitstelle identisch und als notwendig identisch dasteht. Das Jetz als aktuelles Jetz ist die Gegenwartsgabe der Zeitstelle. Rückt das Phänomen in die Vergangenheit, so erhält das Jetz den Charakter des vergangenen Jetzt, aber es bleibt dasselbe Jetzt, nur daß es in Relation zum jeweilig aktuellen und zeitlich neuen Jetzt als vergangen dasteht.»

<sup>97</sup>Ibid. A:I.2.§32. «Für das Zustandekommen dieses Zeitbewußtseins spielt die reproduktive Erinnerung (als anschauliche wie in der Form leerer Intentionen) eine wichtige Rolle.»

<sup>98</sup>Ibid. A:II.Beilage iv. «Nur in der Wiedererinnerung kan ich einen identischen Zeitgegenstand wiederholt haben, und ich kann auch in der Erinnerung konstatieren, daß das früher Wahrgenommene dasselbe ist wie das nachher Wiedererinnerte.»

<sup>99</sup>Ibid. A:I.2.§32. «Das reproduzierte Zeitfeld reicht weiter als das aktuell gegenwärtige. Nehmen wir darin einen Vergangenheitspunkt, so ergibt die Reproduktion durch Überschiebung mit dem Zeitfeld, in dem dieser Punkt das Jetz war, einen weiteren Rückgang in die Vergangenheit usw. Dieser Prozeß ist evidentermaßen als unbegrenzt fortsetzbar zu denken, obwohl die aktuelle Erinnerung praktisch bald versagen ist.»

<sup>100</sup>Ibid. B:II.§23. «Zum Wesen der phänomenologischen Sachlage gehört, daß jedes ‘Vergangen’ produktiv in ein reproduktives ‘Jetzt’ verwandelt werden kann, das selbs wieder ein Vergang hat. Und das is das phänomenologische

intentionality. Either we consider the content of the flow with its form of a flow. [...] Or we direct the view to the intentional unity, to that which in the stream of the flow is intentionally given as unity: then emerges for us the objectivity of the objective time, the authentic time field against the time field of the stream of experience.”<sup>101</sup> In terms of the figure from §76, this says that the moment  $A'_3$  involves both the actual apprehension  $A_3$  of the object  $A$  (typically, with its temporal character) *and* the process of its continuous apprehension represented by the line  $A_0 - A'_3$ . Consciousness of a temporal object involves also, by its very nature, the consciousness of the very stream of consciousness. “This is the one, unitary stream of consciousness in which there is constituted the immanent temporal unity of a tone as well as the unity of the stream of consciousness itself. Obnoxious (if not contradictory) as the fact that the stream of consciousness constitutes its own unity appears, it is nevertheless so.”<sup>102</sup>

This answer remains satisfactory only as long as we are willing to accept some compromises. 79. For the first, we have to accept the phenomenological view and treat memories not as factually coming from the factual past, but as merely actual phenomena carrying a peculiar past time-stamp on them. This aspect of *epoché* seems particularly unpleasant to us involving the fundamental reduction to *actuality*.<sup>103</sup>

A closely connected issue concerns the two related, but also essentially different, aspects of the involved objectivity. Moving within the *horizon of actuality* one addresses only the unity of the aspects from figure §76, of the objective time of the actually apprehended *object* and of the time of its apprehension stretching between retentions and protentions which all belong to the *actuality*, an *actual* “covering of the reproductive with the retentional process.”<sup>104</sup> But the break to which we referred arises between the unity (or totality) of such an *actual experience* and the one which has completely disappeared from the *horizon of actuality*, between the time of the *actual object* and the time of perhaps the same object as it is remembered from a year ago. The unity obtained here is only the unity of the *actual experience*, of the temporality of the *act* of remembrance ( $A_0 - A'_3$ ) *and the actual*, that is, actually represented temporality of the content of this *act*, of the object as actually recollected (which is now the *actual object*, i.e.,  $A_0 - A_3$ ). It is not the unity which lets the (remotely) past time flow into the actual (experience of) time, but only one which lets the actual recollection of the past time be unified with the actually flowing time.<sup>105</sup>

---

#### Fundament aller Zeitgesetze.»

<sup>101</sup>Ibid. A:II.Beilage viii. «Wir haben im Bewußtseinsstrom eine doppelte Intentionalität. Entweder wir betrachten die Inhalt des Flusses mit seiner Flußform. [...] Oder wir lenken den Blick auf die intentionalen Einheiten, auf das, was im Hinströmen des Flusses intentional als Einheitliches bewußt ist: dann steht für uns da eine Objektivität in der objektiven Zeit, das eigentliche Zeitfeld gegenüber dem Zeitleiter des Erlebnissstromes.»

<sup>102</sup>Ibid. A:I.3.§39. «Es ist der eine, einzige Bewußtseinsfluß, in dem sich die immanente zeitliche Einheit des Tons konstituiert und zugleich die Einheit des Bewußtseinsflusses selbst. So anstößig (wo nicht anfangs sogar widersinnig) es erscheint, daß der Bewußtseinsfluß seine eigene Einheit konstituiert, so ist es doch so.» [As the stream of consciousness already here denotes the absolute subject (and will turn into the idealistic subject even more during later phases of Husserl's thought), we could really recognise here an *aspect* of the *nexus* of awareness which is *equipollent* with *self-awareness*, §47.]

<sup>103</sup>Husserl specifies that phenomenology does not aim at the ideal time-point. “That all reality lies in an indivisible now point, that in phenomenology everything is to be reduced to this point, these are downright fictions leading to absurdities. In phenomenology we do not deal with objective time but with the givenness of adequate perceptions.” [Ibid. B:I.12. «Daß alle Realität in dem unteilbaren Jetzpunkt liegt, daß in der Phänomenologie alles auf diesen Punkt reduziert werden sollte, das sind lauter Fiktionen und führt zu Absurditäten. In der Phänomenologie haben wir es nicht mit der objektiven Zeit, sondern mit Gegebenheiten der adäquaten Wahrnehmung zu tun.】 And it is just the event of such a ‘givenness’ within the *horizon of actuality*, “an act which forms the *actual now*, “now” in the sense of the crest of the actual time field.” [Ibid. B:II.26. «einen Akt, der ein jetzt Gegenwärtiges erfaßt, “jetzt” im Sinne des Gipelpunktes der jeweiligen Zeitreihe】 which is an act of *dissociation*, that is, *reflection*. Phenomenology does not attempt reduction to an ideal time-point, but it is thoroughly reductionistic in that everything must be expressed in terms of an *actual experience* grasped in the unity of a *reflective act*.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid. A:I.2.§22. «eine Deckung des reproduktiven mit einem retentionalen Verlauf.»

<sup>105</sup>A:I.2.§23, concerning covering of the intended past by the reproductive ‘now’, achieves just that. The ‘relation’ between the actual and the past ‘now’ emerges as “Gegenbild der zeitkonstituierenden Intentionalität” which, as far as we have seen, is always an event of pure *actuality*. More significantly, the two streams whose unification is supposed to yield the covering of the recollected by the recollection are the stream of reproductive modifications (recollections,  $A_0 - A'_3$ ) and the parallel stream of the recollected moments ( $A_0 - A_3$ ). The peculiarity of the situation consists in that the later stream is itself a repetition of an earlier one – the experienced object is a past object/event with its past duration. Thus, we could expand the figure §76, with an additional objective stream  $B_0 - B_3$ , as if hiding behind  $A_0 - A_3$  (which, by the way, may also reflect some of the meaning of the expression “double intentionality”). The double intentionality effects here, as elsewhere, the covering of the represented stream ( $A_0 - A_3$ ) by the representing one ( $A_0 - A'_3$ ). But it does not effect any unification with the stream  $B_0 - B_3$ , i.e., with the stream of the time of the original past event. This stream is now only represented/reflected/intended

The answer, however, need not be wrong, just because it does not fill all the imaginable gaps. It is, probably, as good and specific as the phenomenological method can allow; the unity can at most concern the *actually* given aspects, here: the *actual* consciousness of the time of a recollected event and the consciousness of the *actually* passing time. Thus, even if intended with respect to the totality of experience, the unity of the stream of consciousness remains confined to the limits of the *horizon of actuality*. And even when so confined, “this intention is unclear [impossible to fulfill, imperceptible], is an ‘empty’ intention, and its correlate is the objective time series of events, which is the dim surrounding of the actual recollection.”<sup>106</sup> The ‘empty intention’ is the phenomenological way of taking into account things which can not be taken into phenomenological account. Often, like here, it refers to something which, although ingraspable and unverifiable in the *actuality* of any phenomenon, appears nevertheless entirely evident. Here, we would be tempted to say: something which is evident *exactly because* it for ever avoids any *actual* determinations, any appearance as a mere phenomenon. The dim surrounding of the actual recollection is, in fact, the dim surrounding of every *actuality* into which disappear also retentions on their way toward the remote and dead past.

80. Founding the unity of time (experience) in the empty intention of the unity of consciousness is, perhaps, the only phenomenological possibility. It carries the germs of idealism of later Husserl which we certainly do not intend to share. For the moment, let us sketch our view of the unity of the two aspects of time – the immediate and the remote (past) – which phenomenologically have turned out to have so little in common.<sup>107</sup>

What seems a bit disturbing in the figure from §76 is the origin, the point *A*, the *Urimpression*. Such impressions appear spontaneously, like everything else in the stream of consciousness, but with the special role and effect of marking a new ‘now’. Husserl notices that, as a matter of fact, even without any new *Urimpression* one experiences the flow of time; even to the point that the very lack of any new impression may become a new *Urimpression* marking a new ‘now’. But ‘now’ has no beginning, no particular point at which it becomes a new ‘now’, as opposed to the (or rather, *a*) previous ‘now’. I notice a pricking which has become so intense that I feel the difference between the moment now and a few minutes ago when no such pricking was felt or, in fact, even present. But once it has become irritating, I also realise that it has been there for a while before I noticed it, as if interleaved with its absence, its irrelevancy. The *Urimpression* is here, so it seems, only the peek which marks a new quality, but which radiates its gradual presence into the surrounding field of its increasing absence. ‘Now’ does not begin, it is *here-and-now*, especially when I *reflectively* notice it, but it only arises constantly from the past, that is, from the just past ‘now’. It is, as Husserl always emphasized, a continuous process. “I can only define ‘continuous’ as that which is without breach, crack, or division”<sup>108</sup> – but not without *distinctions*. Continuity is like that of the waves; we can point to one and to another but never to where, exactly, the one ends and the other begins. Continuity means only that there are no sharp beginnings, for every beginning, except for the *original* one, is but a continuation of what has been before. ‘Nows’ are only points of marked intensity. Whether a hammer which misses the nail (and hits the finger instead!), malfunctioning tools which call for the attentive reflection, or else a beautiful view which makes us stop and gaze – the *attentively* registered ‘nows’ arise breaking the continuity of the flow of experience.



James suggests: “Let us call the resting-places [the •’s] “substantive parts”, and the places of flight [between them] the “transitive parts”, of the stream of thought. It then appears that the main end of our thinking is at all times the attainment of some other substantive part than the one from

by/by the way of/behind  $A_0 - A_3$ , and it remains beyond the reach of the *actual* grasp, beyond any continuity and living contact with the *horizon of actuality*.

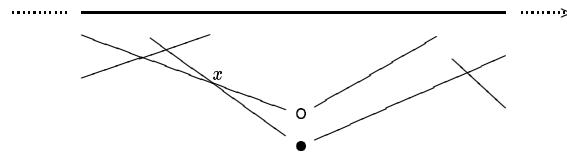
<sup>106</sup>Ibid. A:1.2.§25. «...diese Intention ist eine unanschauliche, eine ‘leere’ Intention, und ihr Gegenständliches ist die objektive Zeitreihe von Ereignissen, und dies ist die dunkle Umgebung des aktuell Wiedererinnerten.»

<sup>107</sup>Asking thus about the unity between phenomena so dramatically dissociated in the phenomenological description, we are not opposing its results. We are only filling in the ‘empty intention’, we are here, as most places elsewhere, constructing and not reconstructing.

<sup>108</sup>W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*. I:9.3

which we have just been dislodged. And we may say that the main use of the transitive parts is to lead us from one substantive conclusion to another.”<sup>109</sup>

Indeed, such breakpoints, such ‘substantive parts’, mark only the particularly intense and reflectively attended nows. The rest, on the last drawing the lines leading to these points, are also part of the experience. We can even think of registered moments which do *not* constitute any ‘now’.



Sitting quietly and strolling with my eyes around the room I am beginning to anticipate that in a moment the quietude will turn into boredom which will annoy me. I am on the way towards an *actual* culmination, a point *o* where boredom would become marked and registered. However, before that happens, at the point *x*, the spider I have just caught in the edge of my eye enters the horizon (attracts my eye), so that the anticipated moment *o* does not occur. The expectation is overtaken by the new leitmotif and *o* – which might have marked a new ‘now’ – is suppressed underneath the quality of the actually emerged ‘now’, the dance of the spider in its web, the registered •. One leitmotif merges with and, gradually, replaces another, but even this continuity is only apparent for it is already cut with various *distinctions*.

It is, however, continuity for the level of *reflective dissociations*. The ‘substantive parts’ only break this (apparent) continuity further and more definitely, yielding the (apparently) discrete • after •. But they do not completely veil the underlying matter of experience; they are not any unfortunate accidents, any falsifications of the flow of ‘true temporality’. They are aspects of the new level of experience, namely, of the reflected experience. Splitting of experience into multiplicity of experiences, splitting of *durée* of temporality into a succession of ‘nows’ is a necessary element, an aspect of the emergence of reflection. Reflection is the exact opposite of continuity, if one likes, it is the attempt to stop the flow, by extracting from it ‘substantial parts’. As such, *reflective dissociation* is also what turns the flow into a succession and marks the new level of experience at which “[t]he mark of the mind is that there do not arise more acts of knowledge than one at a time.”<sup>110</sup> The ‘one act of knowledge’, the object of a representation – in its dissociated and lonely unity – is the aspect constituting ‘the scope’ of the ‘now’. Thinking two things involves, analytically, a succession, an after.<sup>111</sup> This does not exclude the possibility of the *actuality* of several things. Just as one can see several things simultaneously, one can also have them before the mind’s eye, one can think them. Indeed, only that then the several things turn into a *collection*

<sup>109</sup>Ibid. [The color-phi phenomenon gives a good example. If two small spots in a close visual distance are briefly lit in rapid succession, a single spot seems to move. (This phi-phenomenon was originally studied in M. Wertheimer, *Experimentelle Studien über das Sehen von Bewegung*, H. G. van der Waals, C. O. Roelofs, *Optische Scheinbewegung*.) This is, of course, what makes the movies move. If now the two illuminated spots are different in color, the spot seems begin moving and then change the color abruptly *in the middle* of its illusory passage towards the second location. (P. A. Kokers, M. von Grünau, *Shape and color in apparent motion*, D. Dennett, M. Kinsbourne, *Time and the observer....*) The effect depends, of course, on timing and many gradations of the conscious reactions are possible. Describing the phenomenon in terms of objective time and idealised now-points, one would tend to impute the subjects projecting the resulting ‘change of color’ back in time. In this language one would say that later ‘now’ can modify the immediately prior retentional image(s). But it seems much more satisfactory to dispense with any ideal now-points. As argued in D. Dennett, M. Kinsbourne, *Time and the observer...*, the change of color and its location is *really* perceived, just like movement is in the cinema. The temporal separation of the two events, if at all possible, happens far below the threshold of consciousness, at the time scale of cellular brain reactions but not of the consciously identifiable ‘nows’. As the authors suggest, the time separating the two may happen to be too short even for the brain to bother to notice any difference – the phenomenon it constructs, which is so consciously perceived, is that of a moving point changing its color. A ‘now’, as in the figure above, can thus span several ‘objectively’ distinguishable events and points. In such ‘objective’ terms, the dissociation of ‘nows’ from experience can – probably, must – be considered, as in the whole tradition of empiricism, to be *really* an association gathering the impressions dispersed across the impossibly minute time-points into unified and lasting (if only briefly) wholes.]

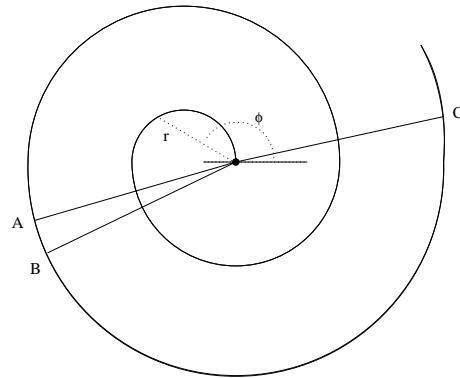
<sup>110</sup>The *Nyaya Sutra*. I:1.16

<sup>111</sup>So much about the time as the dimension of inner experience (if only we take the latter phrase a bit seriously). Time thought objectively as a line is the dimension of *representation* and only equating *representation* with inner experience could suggest the idea that such a linear time has so much to do with it.

of several things, which is the *object*, albeit a bit complex, of one's actual attention.<sup>112</sup>

81. The analyses of the celebrated stream of consciousness, supposedly flowing uninterrupted in the all embracing unity of one flux, stop at the limits of one 'now'. The limits which are, as we have just admitted, impossible to draw precisely, the limits dissolving gradually in the *Umgebung* and disappearing in the fringe which marks equally a transition to another 'now'. Yet, the limits of phenomenological analyses are there and the analyses stop, shall we say, rather disgracefully, at these limits. One may rightly claim that "[t]he transition between the thought of one object and the thought of another is no more a break in the *thought* than a joint in a bamboo is a break in the wood. It is a part of the *consciousness* as much as the joint is a part of the *bamboo*".<sup>113</sup> It certainly is but this does not change the fact that it still is a joint. The unity of the flow across such joints is certainly felt and experienced but it is of different character than the unity of the flow discernible by a purely phenomenological analysis within a single 'now'. This is the difference between retention and recollection, between *primärer und sekundärer Erinnerung*.

Recollection, fetching its content as if from a bottomless well of the 'pure past' (or, phenomenologically speaking, from nowhere – for it is not a phenomenological question whence the contents of consciousness might arise), opens an unlimited horizon. The process of positing earlier 'nows', "is obviously to be thought as unlimited, although the actual recollection fails in practice." Thus, one would like to continue the line  $A - A_3$  from figure §76 not only indefinitely into the future beyond  $A_3$  but also into the past, to the left and beyond  $A$ .<sup>114</sup> This would dissolve everything into a single line (or two parallel ones) and might greatly please the pupils of Cusanus but does not seem quite satisfactory to us. Instead, we would draw the whole (*the whole!*) process as in figure below, as a spiral emerging from the origin...



The figure can be thought of as an enfolding of the original figure from §76 with the point  $A_0$  of *Urimpression* collapsed to the origin of the spiral.<sup>115</sup> An *actual* point is anywhere on the spiral, and the lines linking such points to the origin correspond to the vertical lines  $A'_i - A_i$  from figure in §76. The spiral traversed backwards, say, from  $B$  past  $A$  towards the origin, corresponds to the line  $A'_3 - A_0$  of the collected past. An *actual experience* comprises a small segment of the spiral, say  $A - B$ . At  $B$  the *frische Erinnerung* of  $A$  is still present. As the 'now' of  $B$  moves forward leaving  $A$  behind, it loses gradually the later from its view. At some point, the line connecting the 'now' (e.g., at  $C$  but in fact much earlier) with the past  $A$  must cross the inner part of the spiral. One could take this as representing the point when  $A$  definitely left the span of retentional presence – from now on, it can only enter 'now' as a reproductive recollection.<sup>116</sup> As we pass through more and more rotations of the spiral, the earlier points become screened from the view by ... the memories of the earlier ones. The point where the line from  $C$  crosses the dotted

<sup>112</sup> As observed in footnote 56, it would be tempting to assign to the *horizon of actuality* (and here to a 'now') some objective time duration. But it helps little to measure brain processes and subliminal reactions, even if for most normal persons some average limits might be drawn. A person waking up after 3 years in coma learns that 3 years have passed but they are, in fact, only a single 'now'.

<sup>113</sup> W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*. I:9.3

<sup>114</sup> Let us observe that "unbegrenzt" may mean indefinitely as much as infinitely. In the former sense, at least, it can be easily viewed as an analogy of the indefinite extension of the experienced time into the past towards – but never reaching – one's birth.

<sup>115</sup> We ignore  $r$  and  $\phi$  – they are included only for the sake of the footnote 118.

<sup>116</sup> One would like to allow for something more: the living memories arising, like with Proust, not as mere images but as revitalised moments. The current abstraction does not make such fine distinctions.

half-circle marked  $\phi$  is inaccessible for direct introspection from  $C$ , it can be reached only through the memory of an earlier point – the memory represented by the line from  $C$  crossing the earlier rotation of the spiral. This happens with all events but, in particular, after the first rotation the origin becomes inaccessible getting gradually immersed under ever new and wider rotations. Thus memories emerge in the same process as retentions, one might say, are ‘long distance retentions’, but this very length of the distance makes also a fundamental change of the nature.<sup>117</sup>

One will ask, of course, what happened to the ‘objective’ line  $A_0 - A_3$ . It seems that we have retained only the primed points of impressions. Almost. All ‘objective points’ collapsed to the one point of origin, the only *UrImpression* •. This may certainly seem worrying, though our development so far should have made it less so. One possibility would be to say that *any* point circumscribed by and ‘within’ the spiral so far, any point between the current ‘now’ and the origin, as well as the whole spiral can be taken to represent possible objects. But we prefer to say yes, in a sense, there is only one. All we ever do is to *distinguish* and thus, even if only indirectly, address the *indistinct*. Yet every point on the spiral is a distinct perspective from which the *one* is experienced and, moreover, is involved into different, steadily accumulating past which modifies or even screens earlier experiences.<sup>118</sup>

Every single *object* is *distinguished* from and in the *indistinct* and, as the limit of *distinctions*, is endowed with its (relative) identity and relative time. This *dissociation* of independent *objects* endowed with some residual and lasting identity is *equipollent* with the experience of the time of these *objects*, the time in which the ‘now’ of *reflective actuality* becomes confronted with its own past and future, as well as the past and future of the *objects*. But even this is not yet the ultimately objective time. That time – the ‘time of the world’ – appears through further abstraction of *attentive reflection*. First, one has to dissociate the relation *after* from its context of representation and allow it to connect arbitrary objects. And second, one has to remove the designated *actuality* of ‘now’, the ‘now’ which is *my actuality*. Purely objective time emerges as a next stage of differentiation, as a consequence of ‘abstracting oneself away’, of recovering the uniform time of the world of *externalised objects* from the *unity* of the experience of temporal existence. This happens with *positing* the *totality* of *objects* as the *actual object*, ‘the world’.

Although *reflection* is determined by representing one *object* at a time, it is, of course, conscious of other *objects* and, not least, of perceptions – it is involved into *experience*. Likewise, the one *actual object* may be a *complex* involving several *objects*. Any simultaneity, and such a co-presence in particular, is *spatiality*. It *finds* also the image of ‘the whole world’, namely, simultaneity of all *objects posited* itself as an *object*. (Although such an *object* is rather vague and ideal and, according to relativity theory, even impossible, there is nothing impossible with *positing* it as an *object*.) Combined with the idea of *actuality*, it yields something like ‘the totality of the whole world at this particular point of time’ – the ‘now’ of the world. The relation *after* applied now to this *object* – the whole world – leads to the time of the world.

It is isolation of *one object* which leads to the total, linear order of time. And it is the totalisation, *positing* everything under one *sign*, the *representation* of the ideal ‘whole world’ as one *object*, which yields the one uniform and linear time of this world.

*Temporality* has many pasts and many futures. This is so because it unfolds surrounded by *transcendence*, by the possibility (lived and experienced) of something else, something more, something different. My *temporality* is interwoven into the *temporality* of all things and other people. But if something is considered as an independent ‘whole’, as an isolated *object*, that is, if we, so to speak, suspend the *transcendence*, then there is nothing which can bring in the variation

<sup>117</sup>We will discuss memory in II:2.2.3.i.

<sup>118</sup>My *birth* is not accessible to my memories, yet there is no particular point which marks the beginning of memories. One may legitimately insist on the possibility of indefinite extension of time experience into the past, where indefinite is not to be confused with infinite. As a simple model, we would first postulate some formula for a spiral, say, the Archimedes' spiral described (in the polar coordinates) by the equation  $r = c \cdot \phi$ , where  $c > 0$  is some constant,  $\phi$  is the angle growing indefinitely (i.e., one rotation is  $360^\circ$ , while two  $720^\circ$ , etc.), and  $r$  is the radius from the origin at the angle  $\phi$ . The distance, or a time step, between some earlier point  $\phi_1$  and a later one  $\phi_2$ , is then relative to the angle and approaches infinity as  $\phi$  approaches 0. E.g., letting this distance be  $d = \frac{1}{\phi_1} - \frac{1}{\phi_2}$ , would make any point  $\phi_2 > 0^\circ$  infinitely far away from the origin  $\phi_1 = 0^\circ$ . Also, the older one gets, the smaller becomes the distance between, ‘objectively speaking’, equidistant events. If one day corresponds, ‘objectively’, to the angle of  $10^\circ$ , than for one who is one day old it will correspond to the distance  $\frac{1}{10} - \frac{1}{20} = \frac{1}{20}$ , while for one who is  $100^\circ$  old to  $\frac{1}{100} - \frac{1}{110} = \frac{1}{1100}$ . Although it may be true that days are quite long for children (yet always end too soon) and short for old people (yet often end too late), we do not want to misuse such images.

of multiple futures. The future of an isolated *object* may still be indeterminate but it will be unique. There may be internal changes and states of this *object*, but not a multiplicity of other, alternative *objects* and their time paths. Such an abstract ‘now’ – actuality of an isolated *object* – has only one, unique *before* and only one, unique *after*: these are just stages of the isolated *object* which, being one and alone, can only be in one stage at a time. In case of the ‘world time’, what is posited as an independent *object* is the postulated, ideal *totality* of *objects*. It then “includes” the times of all the objects it “contains”, as particular intervals, projections of its own, global, objective time.

Linearisation of time would take place if we *dissociated* any single being from its relations with *transcendence*. In particular, in order to think ‘my time’ as linear, I do not have to think of myself as an *objective* being, a thing in the world – this would never give ‘*my* time’. On the contrary, I have to isolate myself, so to speak, relativise everything to myself. As we know, this is an abstraction – I have multiple pasts, depending on the contexts in which and depth to which I consider myself and, in the same way, I have multiple futures, all of which are in addition indeterminate.

As the final step, after *positing* the *totality* of *objects* as one ‘world’ and endowing it with its own ‘now’, one can perform the final *dissociation*, that is, the ultimate abstraction with respect to time. It took quite some time before European thought arrived at the idea of empty ‘time in itself’, flowing independently from any things and events.<sup>119</sup> It appears as the ultimate abstraction and, as it seems, even modern science does not need it any more, and so we will not be occupied with it at all.

84. Summarising briefly: *dissociation* of an *object* involves *reflection* into the relation of being *after* the *object* and, as a matter of fact, *after* the whole experience. The *reflective* project of *dissociating* things is thus the same as the project of stretching across the *distance* of *after* which separates *reflection* from its *object*. It is thus the project of ‘freezing’ the *objects* in the *immediacy* of *reflective acts*; ‘freezing’ which, because it never finally succeeds, makes the flow of time the more transparent. Perhaps a bit paradoxically, the *foundation* of the experience of time marks also, at the same time and by its very nature, the attempt to erase time, the thirst for the ever escaping entities ‘beyond time’.

Objective time, the time of the whole world, arises as the ultimate abstraction of this *reflective* process. As Bergson constantly repeated, this objective, ‘spatialised’ time, is only an image of the genuine *temporality* of existence. But we would not, for this reason, consider the one authentic and the other not, the one *eigentliche* and the other not, the one legitimate and genuine while the other only a result of inauthentic mode of existence or of tradition “engulfing all [the] delicate idiosyncrasies in its monotonous sound.”<sup>120</sup> We would not consider the time of the world as a mistaken redundancy falsifying the true temporality. We only observe the difference in the matter of experience, the difference between the lived *existential temporality* and the dead time of the objective world. The latter is an aspect of recognition of *objects* and of *reflective experience* – the reason for diminishing its importance are as many as for making it the only measure of absolute truth, that is, none. In fact, the identities of the *objects* and the *posited objects*, like the *totality* of the ‘world’, contribute significantly to the *reflective experience*. Establishment of the objective time (and objective world; not only a single *object*) is what extends the horizon of our *experience* beyond the mere lived *actuality*, beyond the mere horizon of retentions and protentions, beyond the unity of a single *act* which reaches its end in the same moment in which it leaves its origin. Relations to the world and life are not exhausted by the contents of *immediate experiences*, by the merely *actually* given, and the *actually* remembered and expected. Restricting them to such *actualities* amounts to a reduction, perhaps, to the level of animal experience of time which, true and genuine as it certainly is, does not probably reach the long term memories and abstract recollections of forgotten past. This reduction, like every other (in particular, also the reduction to mere objectivity), is an impoverishment of life. The objective time and world are the reminders,

---

<sup>119</sup> Although Zeno’s arguments assimilated time to a geometrical line, it was still relational time of events, the “numerical aspect of motion with respect to its successive parts”. (Besides, Eleatic Being was timeless anyway.) Nicolas Bonnet in the XIV-th century, Bernardino Telesio in the XVI-th, Francisco Suárez, all involved still in one way or another into Aristotelian physics or cosmogony, postulated true mathematical time in one form or another. The immediate predecessors of Newton, proposing independent time not requiring motion or any objects, were Pierre Gassendi and Newton’s tutor Isaac Barrow.

<sup>120</sup> W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*. I:9.3

the traces of the original unity, and then also of the unity of existential confrontation, retained in the midst of reflective dissociations.

#### 4.3.2. Space

And now, what about space? As mentioned in §19, the element of *spatiality* – as simultaneity – emerged already in *chaos*. *Temporality* is like stretching out this simultaneity along the dimension before-after. But the emergence of *temporality* amounts to a sharper distinction of *spatiality*, too. In fact, only isolating from the *here-and-now* the element of *after* allows the element of simultaneity (that is, neither *after* nor *before*) to be isolated as well. The latter remains as the residual rest, as the simultaneity which remains from the *virtual spatio-temporality* of *here-and-now*, after things started to enter also the *temporal* dimension. *Spatiality* amounts then to *distinguishing* the *here* – from *here-and-now* – as the place distinct from other, but simultaneous places, just like ‘now’ has been *distinguished* – from *here-and-now* – as the place (one would, probably, prefer to say the “point of time”) distinct from the places which come *before* and *after* it.

There is thus a complementary duality: things have the *spatial* aspect to the extent they are seen as simultaneous, or else the *temporal* aspect to the extent they appear *after* each other. The final dissociation of *spatiality* from *temporality* happens when this complementary duality gets *distinguished* into exclusive ‘either ... or ...’, when we begin to conceive things separately either as simultaneous or as ordered along the before-after.

Analogous process to the one from §82 leads to objective space. First, *spatiality* must become 86. the *spatiality* of (arbitrary) *objects*, and then lose its designated *here*. The first thing happens naturally, since *reflection* sees the world as a collection of *objects*. In principle, any of them might be given simultaneously.

One has thus to conceive an abstract *here* of ‘the whole world’, an abstract simultaneity of all *objects*. Such a *here* does not any longer stand in relation to others, it becomes an abstract, that is, *dissociated* and isolated ‘*here*’. (Yet, the questions creating the first antinomy, like “What is outside the space?”, are most naturally asked, indicating precisely that the ‘objective’ space arises from a ‘subjective’, i.e., limited and situated place, *here*.) This lack of ‘outside’, of any transcendence is, in fact, just the opposite side of the idea of its emptiness. Consequently, its *spatiality* is exhausted by the *spatiality* “within it”, the *spatiality* of the *objects* which have only been abstractly gathered in the totality of world’s ‘*here*’.

The *spatiality* centered around an *actual here* has infinitely many dimensions: any *object* marks a possible dimension (if you prefer, a direction for a course of action). Things like below, above, in front, behind, etc., are already further abstractions. The celebrated three dimensions of space are but a further, highly convenient abstraction. But the fact that localisation in objective space can be *represented* by a choice of a reference point and three coordinates seems a very bad reason to postulate them as the original truth of ontology, epistemology, perception, apperception or whatever. They are just that: a convenient *representation*. In and by themselves, they do not follow from the original character of *spatiality* or even of the objective space. As we well know, completely different systems of coordinates may be used which might be much more appropriate for animals with different sensuous mechanisms.<sup>121</sup>

We have thus removed the designated *here* and established objective space. But, one may wonder, 87. where is the extensionality? This, after all, is taken to be a constitutive aspect of spatiality; *objects* in space are exactly the ones which have extension. The answer is: extension is precisely what we have termed simultaneity, once the space has been *dissociated* and then re-filled with the *objects*. It is not something that *explains* possibility of co-existence, of simultaneous presence of distinct *objects* – it *is* this very simultaneity. An extended *object* is one which has some (more or less sharp) boundaries separating it from the surrounding. These boundaries are, in fact, cut from the *object* itself, *distinctions* made within (or around) the *distinguished object* itself. The extension of an *object* is the very simultaneity of its boundaries (left, right, lower, upper, etc.) Distance is just another way of saying extensionality. It only depends on where we draw boundaries, how we make the cuts. We want to focus on an independent *object* – the simultaneity of its aspects is called “extensionality”; the simultaneity of different *objects* is called the “distance” between them.

---

<sup>121</sup>A vision system, like that of cattle, allowing one to see (almost) 360° might naturally lead to the use of polar coordinates with the additional indication of height and distance from the reference point.

If we imagine the boundaries of an *object* collapse, we obtain a point. A point has no extension. Is it in space? Yes, but only if we imagine it there, that is, only if we imagine it co-existing with other points (or system of coordinates, or its surrounding, or any other things posited as co-existing along with it). It may be a bit too advanced a gymnastics of imagination to try to think a single point, but it is possible. Such a point is then not in space, it has no spatial aura – precisely because it is thought in complete isolation, without any simultaneous counterparts.

88. Finally, there remains the idea of homogeneity which is the same as infinite divisibility. It applies equally to space and to time.<sup>122</sup> Homogeneity results from the two steps of the constitution of objective time and space: applying the respective relations (after and simultaneity) to arbitrary objects and then removing the actual ‘now’, respectively, here.

The first ‘fills’ the whole (time or space) with homogenous *distinctions*, which, although in themselves highly unlike and heterogeneous, by the fact of having been viewed as mere *objects* acquired also the homogenous character of isolated, independent *actualities*. In the extreme, most abstract sense, an *object* is a mere indication of ‘independence’, of an isolated, substantial entity, of a mere fact of its being, in short, a point. (This abstraction of a point, however, like the other abstractions we are addressing at the moment, is not something which requires a conscious effort. It is given along with *pure distinction*. Conscious effort is needed only to bring it to *actual consciousness*, to establish it as an explicit representation.)

The second step removes the designated point of reference thus effecting a true uniformity, ‘equivalence’ of all points spread along the time line, respectively, in space.

The idea of infinite divisibility emerges now quite naturally. On the one hand, there is the experience of divisibility, the potential of making always new *distinctions*. This, however, does not in itself account for infinite divisibility of objective time and space. At every stage, one has made only such and such, so and so many *distinctions*, and one lives through these – not through the possibility of making more. The lived process is a process of *distinguishing* but not of infinite *distinguishability*. With infinity of objective time and space we are by far in the realm of ideality. Their very foundations – the objectified *totality* of the world of *objects*, its postulated ‘here’ and ‘now’, the homogenous points filling them – all these are *posited abstractions*, that is, not *representations* of lived experiences but their ideal limits. Infinite divisibility is just the equally ideal limit of *distinguishing*, posited for the homogenous totalities of objective time and space.

#### 4.3.3. Objective or constituted?

89. It is identity, solidified and sedimented in *objects*, that transforms the original *temporality* into time and *spatiality* into space. But we should state clearly: time and space are not the conditions of possibility of the *objects*, nor other way around. They are *equipollent*. There are no *objects* without space and time. But neither could we arrive at time and space, if we didn’t also reach the *representation* of *objects*. Instead of conditions of possibility we rather speak about the order of *founding*, and there it is the continuity of *proto-experience*, timeless as it is, which precedes both spatio-temporality of *horizon of actuality* and *recognitions*, and which, in turn, precede space, time and *objects*.

To be sure: we are not doing here the impossible, we are not constructing *objective* time nor space – only a *representation* of objective time or space. More precisely, we are constructing a *representation* of *spatiality*, that is, of simultaneity of different objects and of their *temporality*. *Spatiality* and *temporality* are still aspects of undissociated *experience* and thus can be concretely experienced in the simultaneity and flow of *distinctions*. They can not, however, be reduced to any concept. When we attempt to represent them, we arrive at the objective time and space which, in terms of *experience*, are indeed only empty concepts of empty containers. These, conversely, can not be *experienced* but only constructed, these are constructions. Flow and simultaneity are parts of *experience*; successive ordering of world’s (or any *object*’s) stages and the simultaneity of the *totality* of all *objects* are conceptual constructions of reflective thinking.

90. So, after all, we have not obtained any objective time or space but merely ‘subjective’ represen-

---

<sup>122</sup>Bergson attributed it exclusively to space and was talking about “spatialised time”, a degenerated duration, in order to account for this. It should be clear that, although our development is very intimately related to his, space and time are for us equiprimordial and develop in parallel from the virtualities of pre-temporal simultaneity and spatio-temporality.

tations? For, do we not reduce the objective time to its phenomenal constitution, that is, do we no strip it of its ‘objectivity’? Does not, after all, the whole process of *distinguishing* and gradual emergence of time and space happen already within time and space, within ‘objective’ time and space?

Well, we certainly want to emphasize that the time as we experience and understand it is relative to our ... experience and understanding. Constructions need not be false or unreal because they are constructed – but they *are* only to the extent they are constructed. The shortest meaningful unit of time is relative to the minuteness of objects which we are able to distinguish and relate. It is conceivable that a consciousness “could live so slow and lazy a life as to take in the whole path of a heavenly body in a single perception, just as we do when we perceive the successive positions of a shooting star as one line of fire.”<sup>123</sup> The world, and the time of such a consciousness would be expressed in very different way than ours. A being living for only a fraction of a second, whose whole life consisted of a single event, say a division in two beings, might have an extremely poor experience of time.

But one would say that the differences here concern only different time-scale, not the time itself. All these beings can be considered as living in the same, ‘objective’ time. Indeed, they can but to the extent they are so considered they are placed within not so much my or your experience as in, well, ‘objective’ time. And every *object*, with the most abstract and *posited* ‘objectivity’ included, assumes and requires an *existence* which *distinguishes* it. And so is it with time. “When I say that the day before yesterday the glacier produced the water which is passing at this moment, I am tacitly assuming the existence of a witness tied to a certain spot in the world, and I am comparing his successive views: he was there when the snows melted and followed the water down [...] The ‘events’ are shapes cut out by a finite observer from the spatio-temporal totality of the objective world,”<sup>124</sup> eventually, from the *unity* of the *indistinct*. “Time presupposes a view of time.”

But is not this last claim an (intended and idealistic, if not merely unfortunate) inversion of the 91. famous phrase, according to which exactly the opposite is the case, namely that “perception of succession presupposes succession of perceptions”<sup>125</sup>? This observation could be twisted into a claim about some ‘objective’ time, as if a view of time presupposed time. But this would be a misinterpretation. The phrase (like the whole paragraph, and the whole book) concerns the unity of *consciousness* of time, with its double intentionality in which reproduction of a past event in the present ‘now’ is itself involved into the flow of time involving this very ‘now’, §§78.-79. The ‘succession of perceptions’, which might be misunderstood as meaning some ‘objective succession’, refers only to the transcendental level which constitutes the actual consciousness of succession.

We have suggested that reducing everything to the mere *actuality* of *reflective acts* seems unsatisfactory to us and that we would rather avoid the danger of ending in idealism (which is equally imminent in phenomenology as in empiricistic nominalism) with its subjectivistic flavour. But we do recognise relativity of all *distinctions* to the *existence*. Where is the difference? Only in *one*. We do not constitute anything, we *distinguish*, which in the last instance means: discover. True, what we discover is only our view and perception of the world, our ways of *distinguishing* the *indistinct*, but this is also what for ever keeps the hammer of some indefinable ‘objectivity’ over all sorts of subjectivistic reductions. We did not constitute objective time – only its *representation*. And this *representation* is ‘true’ because it actually constitutes its own *object*, because objective time is nothing more than objectified temporal experience, than succession viewed in abstraction from the experiencing *existence*, which eventually leads to succession without anything successive. Having once arrived at this objectivisation, it is impossible to turn around and pretend that it is not there. Any *distinction*, once made, remains forever – it is what lies in its nature of making a difference. Time is there, as a necessary aspect of the experience of ‘objective world’. It is an aspect of the conscious *actuality* which, emerging after its *dissociated objects*, discovers in this very *act* both its temporal relation to these *objects* and their temporal character.

The fact that an experience is relative to the experiencing being does not in any way diminish its ‘objectivity’, here, the ‘objectivity’ of time. Every *distinction* is relative to the *distinguishing* being, but it is a *distinction in* the homogeneity of the *indistinct*, drawn *through* or *from* the

<sup>123</sup>H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*. III;p.195

<sup>124</sup>M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. III:2

<sup>125</sup>E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. B:II.20

heterogeneity of the background *chaos*. As such, a *distinction* made by you is as ‘objective’ as a *distinction* made by an ant. The human experience of time is as ‘objective’ as the experience of an ant, even though the latter probably does not go as far as experiencing the objectivity of time. But objective experience does not require an *experience of* this very objectivity. Experience of the objectivity of time requires a *reflective dissociation* of the experience into *external objects*, and ants probably do not reach this level. Yet their experience involves *distinctions* and time which are equally ‘objective’ as ours.

Experience of objective time, as of *objectivity* in general, arises through *externalisation*, through gradual abstraction from the relativity to the experiencing being. The ultimate objectivisation would thus abolish all *distinctions* and to prevent such a collapse into *indistinct*, some elements must remain recognisable. Objectified succession and co-existence, time and space emerge as objective since they are not relative to any *particular* human being or existence. But speaking about time or space without any *existence* and its ability to differentiate the *indistinct*, is to project *distinctions* into the *indistinct*, is to forget differentiating *existence* in the very moment of making the claim of its irrelevance. Experience of objective time not so much presupposes ‘objective’ time as reveals it, brings it forth, just like any *distinction* brings forth whatever it *distinguishes*. And it is founded in the ultimate *unity* of *existence* which precedes both the *temporality* of experience and the experience of time. The experience of time, like every other experience, is *both* a discovery *and* a creation. Neither is possible without the other; every “[a]pprehension is not only a reflection but also a creative transformation.”<sup>126</sup> This experience involves much more than mere registration of the ‘objective passage of time’ – there are modes, as well as levels, of experience which do not involve objective time and which, so to speak, suspend the validity of its flow. Thus, even if the whole setting can remind about Kantian forms of intuition, the analogy is restricted to the level of *reflective experiences* (which, discovering ‘objective’ time is already involved into *temporal experience*). In fact, the *a priori* of our *existence* reaches deeper than the actual flow of time to the mere fact of *distinguishing* and, eventually, of the *confrontation* with the *indistinct*. We ‘discover’ objective time but, of course, this ‘discovery’ is made possible by the structure of our being which brings the *original nothingness* and *chaos* to the level of *reflective dissociation*. It is also this fact, that we discover and not merely constitute, which accounts for the natural and obvious interweaving of our *experience* of time with the objective time. These are not *experienced* as two different times – simply, because they are not two. On the contrary, the *temporal experience*, when arriving at the experience of objective time, finds itself already not only in the prior *temporality* but also ‘in’ this, just discovered, objective time. Our ‘constitution’ of time is not transcendental in which case one is immediately “referred back to the crucial problem, that of time of transcendental constitution. According to which time does it take place? Is it a time itself constituted by an atemporal subject? Is the subject itself temporal?”<sup>127</sup> Our order of *founding*, once the objective time has been discovered, is seen to have evolved in this objective time, because what has been constituted is not this time but only its *reflective experience*.

## 5 Reflection and Experience

Words, the paradigmatic *signs as signs*, the *signs of reflective dissociation*, make something transcending *actuality* present. Nevertheless, the constitutive feature of *reflection* is *dissociation* of its *actual object*, *positing* it in its isolated independence from the *non-actual* surrounding, from the wider context of experience, eventually, from all the *non-actual* rest. Thus *reflection*, nourishing itself on the experience and, in particular, its *non-actual aspects*, performs its function in an apparent opposition and, in the extreme cases, perfects its function in a direct opposition to it. The present section is devoted to this tension and to suggesting some of its possible consequences which we will try to avoid later on.

### 5.1 Actual and non-actual

92. In the Hebrew language (of Old Testament) one did not distinguish clearly between word and thing. From the primitive root “amar” (*rma*), meaning ‘to speak’ or ‘to say’, there derives the

<sup>126</sup>N. Berdyaev, *I and the world of objects*. II:1

<sup>127</sup>J. Derrida, *The Problem of Genesis....* I:2

word “imrah” (*hrma*), meaning ‘word’, ‘speech’ and, in particular, ‘word of God’ as a command and what is commanded. From the primitive root “dabar” (*rbd*), meaning ‘to speak’ but also ‘to converse’, ‘command’, ‘promise’ or ‘warn’, there derives the noun “dabar” (*rbd*) which means ‘word’, ‘speaking’ as well as ‘something’ (spoken of), ‘thing’, ‘act’.<sup>128</sup> The creative power of the Word which was in the beginning need not be taken so literally.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, words do ‘create’, and it is creativity of reflection. They ‘create’ by fixing in an *actual* – and that means, in particular, graspable and repeatable – form of a *sign* the flux of experience and of the experienced. Word has the power of ‘freezing’ something which, if unsaid, might pass almost unnoticed. As long as I am engaged in an undisturbed (though not necessarily uneventful and indifferent) course of experience without talking about it, I am actually engaged in a flux where things, although identified and recognised, do not stand out sharply from the background. To experience is to participate in this flux. But if I pause and observe, saying “Look at *this!* It is so-and-so but also a bit like that, consider this, reflect over this...”, I am giving it a more definite shape, I am dissociating it in order to bring it to my or other’s attention. Such an act may give more intensity to this *actual experience* but at the same time, almost paradoxically, it also diminishes the quiet sense of experiencing: by isolating *this* one element, it removes it from the rest in which it lives. Of course, this dissociation needs no words but words make it sharper, they express (the possibility of) a definite dissociation in which the *sign as a sign* points ostentatiously towards ‘...’. This ‘...’ towards which it is pointing may still be imprecise and not well defined. Yet, the very act of pointing and the very *actual*, precisely limited *sign* create the context where something has been definitely dissociated, even if not clearly identified. An objective center, an axis around which attention may rotate is established – an act of reflective cut from experience has found place, the flux has been frozen leaving the sediment of the *actual* content, an object or objective constellation.

Words bring forth something which has already been experienced and recognised. But, in addition, they give it a special status, a more definite form, which makes up a qualitatively new character of an experience. Even if they create only by focusing, they still create; they bring a new order into experience. “It would be odd to say: «A process looks different when it happens and when it doesn’t happen.» Or «A red patch looks different when it is there and when it isn’t there – but language abstracts from this difference, for it speaks of red patch whether it is there or not.»”<sup>130</sup> Words put the definitive end to the uncontrolled flux of experience providing a system of *signs* which, by their nature, stand beyond and above this flux. Quite a long-termed linguistic analysis is needed to establish the changes and flux of the language itself. Such changes may involve mere ‘sliding’ of the semantical fields of various words but also, and perhaps even typically, their gradual differentiation resulting in more precise meanings.<sup>131</sup> But in the experience of an individual, words are *signs* which by their external, extra-temporal character provide the means of sedimentation and identification, of dissociation of experience into experiences. Learning a language amounts to adopting (and adapting!) the distinctions and identities stored in its words and ways of using them. It is a unique (albeit not the only) entrance into the world of reflective

---

<sup>128</sup>There are numerous examples – like that in Gen. XV:1, “After these *things* the *word* of the Lord...”, Gen. XXVII:42, “And these *words* of Esau...”, Gen. XXX:31, “And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any *thing*: if you wilt do this *thing* for me...” – where both “*thing*” and “*word*” translate “*dabar*”.

<sup>129</sup>Especially, considering that *logos* of St. John seems to carry enough of the influences from Philo to be taken the way the tradition has taken it, that is, in a much more Greek sense of, say, providential reason, soul of the universe.

<sup>130</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:446

<sup>131</sup>Multiple examples of such refinements exist. One can mention German “*weil*” which, in the XVI-th century, was used rather indiscriminately for “because” and for “so long as”. A famous – because of the resulting controversies – case is found in the Torgau declaration: “... we have at all times taught that one should accept and uphold the validity of temporal laws in what concerns them *weil* the Gospel does not teach anything contrary...” [after W. D. J. C. Thompson, *Luther and the right of resistance to the emperor* p.185] The idea of causality (in the modern, post-Galilean or perhaps even post-Newtonian sense) and the idea of, say, accidental co-occurrence “created” mutually each other (at least as far as the German vernacular is concerned) out of the *nexus* of *weil*. Multiple examples can be found in anthropological literature. E.g., quoting Holmes, Mauss mentions Papuan and Melanesian dialects which have “one single term to designate buying and selling, lending and borrowing.” [M. Mauss, *The Gift*. II:2] The exchange of goods is still involved in the *nexus* of “total services”, the distinct aspects of which have not yet become dissociated. As another example, he notes that “the farther one goes back in Antiquity the more the meaning of the word “*familia*” denotes the ‘*res*’ that are part of it, even going so far as to include food and the family’s means of subsistence. The best etymology of the word “*familia*” is without doubt that which compares it to the Sanskrit “*dhaman*”, ‘house.’” [Ibid. III:1]

experience.

93. Reflective dissociation means setting the limits, definitely and precisely cutting off and thus enhancing (if not establishing) the identity of whatever is named or denoted. ‘Freezing’ endows thing with a permanence, by dragging it out of the *chaos* and experience it establishes it as an independent – because isolated and permanent – element. As the expression of establishing the identity (proper names being the ultimate examples), words ‘give souls’ to things, like Adam who not only arranges but in fact enlivens all the things and animals by giving them names. Naming used to have a magical character and pronouncing a name could amount to contacting the transcendent dimension of the soul of the named person or spirit. The God of The Old Testament is quite busy with giving names (or new names) to his people expressing their (new) identity.<sup>132</sup>

By this very token, by freezing, isolating and bestowing identity, words mean also power. The primal power of God’s over his people is expressed clearly by (if not simply *equipollent* with) his power to name them. Solomon, knowing the names of all the spirits, held them subject to his will.<sup>133</sup> A spirit, a thing named, that is ‘frozen’ and *dissociated* from its surroundings becomes subordinate to the one who so *dissociated* it: gaining independent identity it also becomes vulnerable. Even though it must appear in a wider context in order to be purposefully manipulated, its isolation is the first step necessary for inclusion of *this* thing into its *complex* context, and thus for manipulating *this* thing. This is quite a fundamental aspect of the almost embarrassing triviality that in order to control *X*, *X* must be there, one must be able to distinguish *X* at all.

In the most specific sense, the power of words is the power of *reflection*. To ‘freeze’ and set the limits, to *externalise*, means to objectify and to objectify means to make visible. (“To see means: to give preliminarily an object as an object. [...] seeing has the meaning of making available (of something object-like) in the distinctive sense of pure acquainting (with things).”<sup>134</sup>) The structure of *visibility* – *object*’s identity, independence from the background and, above all, its limitation *within the horizon of actuality* – places *object* within the horizon of our control. *Dissociating* contents from their origin, externalising them as *objects* independent from the background to which they belong, we gain power.

94. The creative power of actual words reflects the processes of distinguishing and recognising the identities. Eventually, and in most generous sense, it is the power of dissociating and connecting, of setting (some of) the *actual* limits. But the power of *reflection* is, in another sense, only illusory. This power is only over that which enters the *horizon of actuality*, over the *actual signs* and not, in any case not always and not without much further *ado*, over what these *signs* may possibly point to! *Reflection*, taken in itself, gives power over *signs* and only *signs*.<sup>135</sup> But the *distinctions* and the world of experience are much more than the *actual objects* which can be grasped, not to mention fully exhausted, within this horizon. And these *distinctions* find also their expression in words.

## Beyond actuality

95. “I spent two weeks in Prague with my girlfriend.” What am I talking about, what am I referring to by this “two weeks”? A *concept* ‘two weeks’? Hardly, and if so my girlfriend wouldn’t be pleased. What I mean by this phrase is what the phrase is pointing to, namely, *this experience*. I am referring to *these particular* two weeks, to all the moments, events, moods I experienced during these two weeks but, above all, to the whole experience of these two weeks. Whoops! “the

---

<sup>132</sup>“[N]either shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; [...] As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. [...She] shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac.” [Gen. XVII:5-15-19] There is more to this aspect of naming a person to which we will return in Book III. Here we are concerned only with the identity resulting (in the case of things and objects) from *dissociation* and reflected in the acts of naming or, generally, of using *signs*.

<sup>133</sup>In a Hebrew myth written down around IX-th century, the revolt of Samael’s is preceded by his defeat in the competition with Adam according to the rules set by God: “I created animals, birds and reptiles. Go down, place them in a row and, if you are able to give them names which I would give them, Adam will revere your wisdom. But if you fail and he succeeds, you will have to revere his.” [Bereshet Rabbati. p.70]

<sup>134</sup>M. Heidegger, *Augustin and Neoplatonism*. §14.b.

<sup>135</sup>Instead of control and power, we could speak here (and elsewhere when only *reflection* is concerned) about manipulation. Its Latin etymology reflects the fact of being graspable, fitting into the hand (*manus*), and being underlined the authority of one’s commands, like a small company, a handful of soldiers (*maniple*).

experience of two weeks"? What is that? Isn't experience something which always happens *here-and-now*, within the *horizon of actuality*? I can experience the table in front of me, the window to the left, the present situation – but two weeks? What kind of thing is 'two weeks' that I can experience it? For, to be honest, I must tell you that I did experience it, not only as a sum of single moments but as a one whole.

I see – perceive – a detail of a building. In itself it would hardly pass for an experience anywhere outside the philosophical tradition, but since this, too, can be a source of the unexpected, let it pass. I watch *Vltava* from *Karlův most* enjoying a gentle breeze. I do it both – simultaneously or interchangeably – being aware and unaware, conscious and unconscious of this experience. In a while the pleasure of the moment becomes so clearly intensified that I am actually beginning to half-reflect over it, perhaps recalling other similar moments, perhaps just staying in this one with full – reflected – appreciation. During the walk uphill to *Hradčany*, the breeze and *Vltava* got imperceptibly lost in the labyrinth of the narrow streets, but nothing has broken the continuity of the experience. The same moment from the bridge is now extending to the *chrám sv. Mikuláše*, the buildings around *Malostranské náměstí*, the steepness of *Zámecké schody*. It is *the same experience* furnished by a more variation in the material of the world. When I meet my girlfriend at the portal of *Katedrála sv. Václava*, we have a brief recollection of a quarrel from this morning which changes the mood. But neither of us is really up to a quarrel in such a nice weather and place, and we start enjoying the surroundings together. It isn't any more exactly the same experience from the bridge and to the cathedral. But it is now the same *experience of being together* in Prague, furnished by yet more variation in the material of the world, perceptions, moods and feelings.

Just like the whole walk, the whole morning, the whole day is experienced and can be an experience, 96. so are the whole two weeks. But one might say: I only *know* that I was there for two weeks but what I experienced were only single moments. This certainly does not have to be so. Surely, a lot of different things happened and I do remember some of them. I have encountered various moods, ups and downs, different weather, places, people, etc. But all these variations were underlined by a constant mood, the feeling of congenial surroundings and company, which persisted through – above or below – all the moments of different small experiences. When I say "I spent two weeks in Prague with my girlfriend" I recollect my girlfriend, Prague and this mood. Another two weeks in Prague will necessarily be different because, even if they be accompanied by the same mood, it will be modified by the remembrance of the first experience.

But, suppose that no such underlying mood was there, that I only experienced and remember different days, different people, different places. I still have been in Prague for two weeks and while I have been there I was experiencing not only separate moments but also my stay. On the last day I had a definite feeling that the two weeks have ended, that they, perhaps, weren't what I had expected them to be, that I was disappointed by their character, or else, on the contrary, satisfied in spite of the lack of some unifying impression of the whole. The whole 'two weeks' are experienced here as well, only, in a poorer, less meaningful way. Poorer and less meaningful because now their *unity* gives place to a mere *totality*, to the mere matter of a definite time span, that is, because it is a cut from *experience* effected by an arbitrary criterion utilising the determinations of objective time – not by any unifying *original sign*.

In either case, the phrase "two weeks in Prague with my girlfriend" refers to some *totality* (perhaps even *unity*) of *experience*; not to any concept but to a concrete *experience*. Obviously, this experience is not fully contained in what is being said. But the phrase does not abstract anything from it, it does not convey any 'conceptual' or 'propositional content' distinct from and alien to the *experience*. The phrase only refers to or *points towards it*. It is an *actual* – and abstract – *sign* of something which, in its *concreteness*, lies beyond *actuality*.

When I say "two weeks in Prague with my girlfriend" I recollect my girlfriend, Prague, and this mood. It would be strange if the phrase meant the same to my girlfriend and to you but, as words in general, it carries enough meaning to establish some degree of common understanding among all who hear it. Now, what does it mean that I recollect Prague, what does the word "Prague" mean? Well, if I had never been to Prague, it would be just a word for some place I have heard of, a point on the map, an abstract *object*. But what 'place', which place? What is a 'place'? If this building is a place, and this square is a place, is also this-building-and-this-square a place? and when I was there, saw and experienced the city? Even more, if I was born there and it was the first city I ever saw. It did not happen at any point, it simply took time to develop – not the concept, 97.

but – the experience of my home-city. And what is it? What is a city, what is an experience of a city? Where does a city begin and where does it end? What can it mean “to experience a city”? I walk around and see buildings, streets, people. At what specific moment do I experience the city Prague? At none but, at the same time, at all. Each moment is an experience of an aspect, a part of the ‘city experience’. But there is no one in which I can say “Now I am experiencing the whole Prague”, there is no single, actual experience of Prague.

98. One might ask, if not only single moments, then why two weeks? Why not two years, twenty years? Why not the whole life? Indeed, why not? The experiential limit of unity is my whole life, and all particular experiences are only actual modifications, manifestations of this fundamental unity.<sup>136</sup> Some might resist the idea that we *experience totalities* which go far beyond any particular moment of time, beyond the *horizon of actuality*. Yet, it is quite natural to speak not only about “experiences gathered during my stay in Prague” but also about “my experience of Prague”, not only about “what different things I have seen there” but also about “what Prague was like”. It is so natural because, indeed, experience does not consist of a totality of more or less minute experiences, is not a sum of some ‘objective’ intervals marking separate experiences. An experience, a reflective dissociation of some totality from the horizon of experience happens only on the basis of the continuity and unity which precedes and founds the possibility of such a dissociation. Experience is a mode of being which is not restricted to the pure actuality of here-and-now, but which develops in a temporal continuity exceeding any actuality.

*Experience exceeds the horizon of actuality, and any particular experience may exceed this horizon. The unity of experience is not obtained from a totality of minute actualities but, on the contrary, founds such a totality.*

### Not concepts, not phenomena

99. The experience in this sense has little to do with the traditional, least of all empiricists’ or pragmaticists’, notion of experience. What corresponds to such a notion is an experience and a multiplicity thereof. Our concept tries only to keep with the common usage of the term. However, with such an all-embracing idea, is there anything that is not experience? I haven’t been to Australia, and yet, Australia is something which definitely is distinguished in my experience. Every particular, distinguished thing (this table, Prague, Australia, anger, love) are elements of experience. On the other hand, there are aspects accompanying all experience which themselves can not be objects of any experience. Yet every aspect of an experience is itself experienced, even if it never happens to be an object of experience. The sphere of the un-recognised contents, the chaos of proto-experience and nothingness are not any experiences but are, nevertheless, experienced. To reduce their experience to merely actual experiences is to completely misconstrue their nature, usually, to deny them any reality.
100. Experience and what is experienced comprises much more than phenomena. When a phenomenologist analyzes a phenomenon of, say ‘life’, or ‘his life’ or ‘world’, he does not analyze anything which actually appears in his consciousness when he thinks (anschaut) ‘world’. In the moment when I think ‘world’, nothing specific appears for me, because what I know about, mean by, experience of the world cannot be given within the horizon of any single act of consciousness. What he does is searching his experiences, is following a chain of associations, looking for the aspects, properties which he finds related to the ‘world’. In particular, he follows this chain beyond whatever is present in his consciousness in the moment when he says “world”. What is its intentional object supposed to be? The best one can say is that “it is something – everything? – out there, but we have no clue what”. What is its essence supposedly resulting from the eidetic reduction?

<sup>136</sup>Quoting and referring extensively to W. Stern, *Psychische Präsenzzeit*, Husserl recognises the unity of an act which extends beyond the ideality of a pure ‘now’. “That a mere succession of tones gives a melody is possible only because the succession of the psychic processes ‘simply’ unifies itself in one total form. In consciousness they follow after each another but they fall within one and the same total act.” [E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. A:1.2.§7] The ‘now’ becomes an extended interval which imperceptibly emerges from the previous one, becomes the next one and, eventually, dissolves in the horizon (of actuality?). In a sense, we only extend this image of continuity and unity of the Husserlian ‘now’ to the temporal unity of the whole existence. On the other hand, we invert the perspective and do not ask about the constitution of unities from the actual data, but only about the emergence of actualities from this prior unity of existence.

And if you find any then how long did you spend looking for it, and how much more – or less – would you find if you looked 2 more years? Likewise, is there any phenomenon of ‘life’? The intentional object of ‘my life’ is my life but it is again “something which I do not know precisely what is”, and there is nothing to indicate that the situation might ever change. We do not have any experience of life, life is not anything one can experience at any particular moment. But we experience life all the time, in a sense, to live is to experience, and so just as we experience our experiencing, we likewise experience life.

‘Life’, ‘beauty’, ‘meaning’, ‘God’ and most other things of significance are not reducible to phenomena, are not reducible to actual contents of consciousness. These, however, are aspects which truly matter – whenever present in experiences, and even more so whenever absent from them. No such things can be analyzed by looking at the actual contents of consciousness alone. If I start thinking about them I will almost for sure arrive at different essences than you. And this is so because their meaning, transcending actuality, is a derivative of the form of existence, and then of experience. They are different from each other and they are recognised as such; saying “world” we do not mean “my life”. But this difference cannot be defined, spelled out, cannot be expressed fully and adequately in precise, that is, actual terms. ‘World’ and ‘life’ transcend any actuality and even the posited totality of all actualities, and a definition must fail because it attempts to appropriate experience, to actualise the essentially non-actual. Experience constitutes a unity not reducible to any totality of actualities and actual signs. And signs which forget that they are only signs turn into mere words.

*Experiences appear for reflection, within the horizon of actuality only as signs, e.g., as words 101. which refer to them. These signs are the immediate, actual data of reflection.*

Everything transcending actuality can enter it only by means of a sign. “Two weeks in Prague” is a sign, and so is “red”, “square”, “my life”, etc. But to be comprised under such an actual sign, the corresponding cut from experience must happen in advance – not necessarily in the order of time, but at least in the order of founding. These prior cuts constitute unities – not totalities – which get differentiated into more actual contents and experiences. ‘Two weeks in Prague’ is not a totality of single moments but their unity. Experiences are interwoven into the continuous texture of experience. Only reflective dissociation establishes them as independent objects and then, their definite sharpness is just the actuality of the sign through which they appear.

The question about such individuals – which transcend actuality, cuts which traverse experience above the horizon of actuality – is much more fundamental than the question about universals (which we will address in Book II). Although, like universals, not limited to any actual moment, they are the most individual and concrete things: we were talking not about any ‘two weeks in Prague’ but about ‘these two weeks’, not about some ‘world’ in general, but about this very world we are living in, not about ‘life’ but about ‘my life’. In this, and only in this, consists a possible similarity to phenomena. But they differ in that ‘Prague’ or ‘these two weeks’, whenever made into objects of reflection, appear at once at a distance from the actuality of the phenomenon, announce at once the inadequacy of whatever signs are used to describe them – speaking Husserlian, they make adequate intuition an impossibility. I may have no concept whatsoever of ‘Prague’ or ‘these particular two weeks’ when I am relating my experience of them. And truly, experiences and distinctions like these become associated with words and phrases in such a free manner, that each time talking about them I may use different formulations. For their character and unity is not constituted by words or other actual signs but, on the contrary, founds the possibility of giving any coherent description.

### Confrontation with transcendence

An experience – a reflective confrontation with experience – is the source of novelty and surprise. 102. It always comes to reflection and is never brought about by reflection. Sure, I can make all kinds of plans and preparations in the attempts to provoke some experience. I may anticipate its character and help it occur. I can decide to, book and go for a trip to Prague and spent two weeks there. But to the extent ‘Prague’ and these ‘two weeks there’ are experienced, they emerge as something independent, they offer themselves to me in their expected and unexpected richness, in their concrete forms which I sought but did not cause. An experience is always given and never taken. When it occurs it does so from its own source, it brings me all that I, on my own, could

not produce – which was the reason that I could only attempt to *provoke* it in the first place.

The aspect of *transcendence* is not, not even primarily, limited to *externality of actual objects*. Like every *actual sign* is permeated by the *distanced presence of non-actuality*, so an *act*, limited to the *horizon of actuality*, encounters not only an *external object* but also the context of experience reaching beyond this horizon. Words can refer not only to experiences but also to the experienced, eventually, to all levels of experience. As we will see again and again, the deeper layer of life, the more constant it is but also the more ephemeral, because the less fixed, are its *actual manifestations*. Furnishing the *signs* for these deeper layers, words endow the ingraspable and *non-actualisable* with the character of recognisable and repeatable permanence. Although the *distance* separating such words from what they express may be infinite, they nevertheless bring thus the most fundamental, the least expressible aspects of life closer to the *actuality* of reflective consciousness. Their ‘creative’ character consists here in the fact that the form of manifestation of the *transcendent* is almost totally dependent on the choice of the *actual expression*, on the used *signs*. In the extreme cases, the *signs* which became mere signs, mere words may even obscure its presence.

*Reflection* meets always only things which, in some sense, are already familiar, which have already been there, *distinguished, recognised and concrete*, that is, merged in the continuity of experience. Precise visibility of a *reflected object*, clarity of a *reflective thought* is achieved by *dissociating an experience* from this continuity which, for *reflection*, remains vague and inaccessible, unattractive and yet fascinating. For *reflective thought*, experience furnishing all its *objects*, phenomena and novelties is the *horizon of transcendence*. It remains ‘outside’, *reflection* can never appropriate it but, at most, conform to it in the constant dialectic of domination and subordination. Nevertheless, this *transcendence*, this presence is the constant fact of *reflective experience* which surrounds the variety of changing *actualities* with the *unity* which is as certain as it is undefinable. “For the intellect, the unity is only a postulate, an act of faith. For the spirit, the harmony is the experienced reality.”<sup>137</sup>

*Experience is a gift of transcendence. It is an experience only to the extent it confronts reflection with transcendence.*

103. Thus, after all and unlike what we said in §§92.-94, words do not give power. *Reflection dissociates experience* but does not create, it exercises its power only by means of *signs*. These *signs* are neither arbitrarily chosen nor voluntarily generated, they are only the *actual expressions* of the *non-actuality* which, perhaps, can never be reduced to the *actual categories*, can never be underlined the *objective determinations* of *reflection*.

We do, however, encounter *reflection positing an object*, in particular, in the attempts to appropriate *transcendence*, to bring something *non-actual* to the level and categories of *actuality*. The ‘whole world’ as the *totality* of all *objects* is, indeed, something *posited* – it has no counterpart in *any experience*. Speaking about ‘two weeks in Prague’, I may lean toward closing this experience entirely within the *horizon of actuality*, I may attempt to *actualise* it, for instance, by expressing its essence, appropriating it as a concept. But also such attempts are perfectly aware of their inadequacy.

There is only a difference of degree between the two, both amount to *positing an object*. *Positing* amounts to not only deliberately choosing an *object* of *reflection* but also to actually constructing it. There are two fundamental kinds of things which may require such a constructive *positing*: ideal objects (in the sense of pure phantoms, constructed from *dissociated bits and pieces* of earlier *reflections*), and aspects of experience which by their nature cannot be fully comprised within *horizon of actuality*. The latter, like the ‘whole world’ or the ‘totality of time’, although corresponding to some aspects of *experience*, are not experienceable in the form in which they are *posited as objects*. Typically (representation of) such an *object* is *posited* as an ideal limit, as a *totality* trying to reflect the suspected *unity*. “*Positing*” will be used equivocally about all three kinds of *acts* (*dissociating an object*, constructing an abstraction and reconstructing an aspect of *experience*) and the intended meaning will, hopefully, emerge from the context.

---

<sup>137</sup>S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*.

## 5.2 Some problems of reflection

Abstractly, *reflection* is a simple observation ‘that ...’ It merely realises and *externalises*. Every thought can be preceded by such an “I think that...”, but this leads only to a formal notion of reflection which captures only part of its nature but completely misconstrues its potential and significance. Such a ‘that ...’, the explicitly formalised *attentive reflection*, is only repetition of a *reflective experience*. It repeats, in any case, attempts to repeat, *an experience*. When I thus reflectively refer to some situation or thought, I merely try to revoke it in order to bring forth some side of it. But in order to do that, the situation, the thought must have already been isolated in a prior *reflective experience*. This purely repetitive character is what makes such an abstract *reflection* entirely contentless, a mere ‘that’ which leaves all its content in the ‘...’. The lack of content goes however hand in hand with some element of necessity. There is something strict and structurally unavoidable in such an imagined process of that-ing, even if nobody ever carries it more than two, at most three steps (cf. footnote 84). This may attract attention of formalisers but, concretely, has nothing to offer.

Concretely, *reflection* is not a mere observation ‘that ...’ but an observation of the actual ‘...’ – an act of isolating a *particular experience* but also of careful attention paid to its actual *object*. It is intimately involved with this *object* and its problems are related exclusively to that: the choices of its *objects* and the motivations for these choices. Such choices appear easily as arbitrary. In fact, among the *dissociated* alternatives, all appear equally good (or bad) – dissolution into atoms, as independent as unrelated, is an aspect of *dissociation*. Theoretically, one can try to explain the reasons for this rather than that choice but it is only the final result of a series of concrete *reflections* which may, eventually, reveal their motivations and reasons. To start with such a choice would be an impossibility if *reflection* were not anchored in the deeper layers of existence capable of lending it some pre-*reflective* guidance.

The lack of any proof of the universal validity of its choices is a possible expression of the problems of *reflection*. In a sense, *reflection* does something inappropriate, it violates the order of things by *dissociating* something from the rest, positing it as independent entity and bringing it under *reflective control*. Sometimes and somehow this seems simply to desecrate the innocence of *experience*, and the *reflective subject* begins to thirst for the return to the ‘original truth’ (which can be almost anything: the original state of nature, obviousness of senses, certainty of immediacy, frenzy of an orgy, strength of a violent will, feelings, authenticity,...). Also, and in the midst of the thirst, *reflection* is aware of its insufficiency. It comes always too late. The confronting *transcendence* makes it impossible to forget that the *reflective act* is only embracing a mere *sign* of something which forever evades the look, let alone the grasp. The *subject* of a *reflective act* is as isolated as is its *object* – both are not only *dissociated* from each other, but primarily from the rest from which they arose. When limited to the precision of *immediate visibility*, in the constant attention paid to all the details of encountered objects and situations, *reflection* can not eventually find any other form of higher *transcendence* than narcissistic *self-reflection*. But “I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness – a real thorough-going illness.”<sup>138</sup> Such remarks became very common with all the psychologists of the Victorian times and, in particular, with those who – like Dostoevsky, Nietzsche or Kierkegaard – opposed the primitive psychologism. They express certainly a characteristic of that time, but also show a genuine possibility of *reflection*. Let us look at some expressions of this possibility.

### 5.2.1. The original truth

Much of our *experience* passes without any *attentive reflection*. “And even in our conscious life we can point to many noble activities, of mind and of hand alike, which at the time in no way compel our consciousness. A reader will often be quite unconscious when he is most intent: in a feat of courage there can be no sense either of the brave action or of the fact that all that is done conforms to the rules of courage. And so in cases beyond number.”<sup>139</sup> But a lack of *attentive reflection* is not the same as a total lack of *reflection*, not to mention, of (*self*-)awareness. *Attentive reflection*, especially when carried over the edge of its plausibility, thirsts for the immediacy of

<sup>138</sup>F. Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*. I:2

<sup>139</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. I:4.10

being in which it could ‘lose itself’. Trying thus to lose itself, it often would like to lose reflection, or even consciousness, from which it differs only by degree.

“How is the immediate belief in the independent existence of the world pertaining to the natural attitude possible?” The ‘natural attitude’ is probably something to be found outside the philosophical study chamber. But the sensed inappropriateness of exaggerated reflection would like to see in it some completely irreflective, almost animal being-in-the-world. The apotheosis of experience, like any other apotheosis, can yield only a caricature.

But even assuming that such an irreflective, purely experiencing being existed, does it make sense to ask about its “beliefs”, “certainties”, “attitudes”? Such a being might act in its world and arrange it but here any contact *reflection* may establish with it ends. The very fact that one seems forced to use the words like “belief”, “attitude”, etc., proper for a *reflective* being, witnesses to the dubious character of the irreflective pole of the opposition. Unless one is willing to maintain merely metaphorical sense of these words and act as a behaviorist. Eventually, this means to turn into a student of purely *external* realities, to restrict all the attention exclusively to the *objects*, dissociated not only from each other but, primarily and most strongly, from the very *acts* of reflection in which they are encountered. In short, unless one is willing to become a scientist.

Of course one does not, but one would nevertheless like to make a point for scientism. Eventually, in the long run, science will uncover all the secrets of the world and life and then it will turn out that our experience, our *subjective* experience is only a particular instance of some general, *objective* laws. Really? We leave such projects to those who are able to believe in them. Let us, however, for the moment assume that some scientific philosopher manages to reconstruct the whole reality from his objectivistic assumptions. He managed to eliminate all the *qualia* and impressions and demonstrated that “we are all zombies”, he managed to *prove* that freedom is a subjective illusion and that, in fact, everything is really governed by inviolable laws of nature. Besides causing some confusion in various intellectual circles, this would probably give us powerful means of influence and control. Yet, would it really eliminate all the aspects of our existence which were thus reduced to some inviolable principles? Would I change anything in my way of viewing and reacting to people and situations, in my preferences and values, in my hopes for life? Well, I could, perhaps, if I didn’t like a concert, take a pill and feel I liked it after all. Still, I would take it *only because* I did not *like* the concert!

The projects of a total reduction, and reduction to scientifically determinable *objects* in particular, have been around for long enough to suggest that those who claim their all-embracing and universal possibility should demonstrate their factual relevance and truth. There is first the great ‘if’ concerning the very possibility of such a reduction. Even if this turns out to be possible (does anybody believe this?), there remains the second, even greater ‘if’: would it actually give us the control over all the aspects of our existence. We are not even able to control fully the processes of society which is, so it seems, fully human creation. Until these millennia old ‘ifs’ obtain positive solutions, their champions can be safely left for themselves as the victims of the *reflective* sickness to the original and irreflective truth, that is, to the lack of *self-reflection*. Every explanation is a reduction and reduction is *the* means of all science. However, when proposed as the ideology of scientism, that is, when seen as a (never ending) attempt to overcome the dissociation by ignoring one of its *aspects*, it represents simply the outermost limit of irrelevance to our considerations.

106. The ‘original truth’, whether imagined as a pre-reflective state of nature and innocence or else an *external object* of scientific *reflection*, is not only a *reflective* construction. *Reflection* comes always too late and it knows it. “Philosophy, following after the world, after nature, life, thinking, and finding all that as constituted earlier than itself, asks precisely this earlier being and asks itself about its relation to it. It is a return to itself and to all things, but not a return to immediacy, which withdraws to the extent philosophy tries to approach it and melt with it.”<sup>140</sup> *Reflection* can not forget itself, not to mention eliminating itself. The vaguest attempt to think in this direction shows that the attempt has already been undertaken and leads invariably to the situation in which one cannot avoid being “firmly persuaded that a great deal of consciousness, every sort of consciousness, in fact, is a disease.”<sup>141</sup> But despair is only a *reflection* of the attempt to reduce the whole *experience* to the categories of *objective visibility*, that is, of *reflection*. Such attempts encounter *reflection* at every step and cannot pretend that it is not there; they must ask the

<sup>140</sup>M. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. Inquiry and intuition;p.129

<sup>141</sup>F. Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*. I:2

question about reflection's (and that includes their own) relation to the rest of experience. "When this question of second order was once asked, it can not be eradicated. From this moment on, nothing will be able to exist the way as if the question never occurred."<sup>142</sup> But, let us repeat, this breeds despair only if one identifies one's being with this impossibility of coincidence, and starts suffering the presence of *reflection*. And then, as soon as one has constructed a 'solution', a pre-reflective and irreflective being explaining everything, reflection finds itself missing and cannot rest satisfied with a result where it is not taken into account. And now, one suffers the absence of reflection.

In a bit more sober way, one starts with the acceptance of the *reflective dualism*, in a sense, one admits the finitude of *reflection*. The danger, however, remains, namely, the danger of identifying one's own being with *reflection*, in which case it seems that this very being is thoroughly and fundamentally dualistic. And thus, although accepting the *reflective dualism*, one does not accept it after all. This aspect has innumerable forms, so we mention only a few examples. 107.

The *subject-object* dualism is involved into the traces of their original *nexus* which, however, in terms of the *reflective categories* are at best expressed as some kind of relation(s) between the *dissociated aspects*. The standard picture

$$s \xrightarrow{r} o \quad (i)$$

involves one immediately into the self-reflective regress. For  $r$  is itself a relation observed by the *subject* and so can be, and in the moment of being addressed in fact is, a new *object*. This is nothing but the contentless irrelevance of the 'I think that I think that I think ...'. The regress is an effect of the *dissociation* of the act from its *object*, according to which 'that' of an act 'that ...' is distinct from its '...' and, consequently, can constitute a new, higher-level object of next 'that that ...'. As we observed in §69, the empty formality of this operation does not apply to (*self*-)awareness. The *equipollence* of awareness and *self-awareness*, which *finds reflection*, makes such a regress if not impossible so, certainly, unnecessary for the phenomenon of self-consciousness. Every moment of awareness (of an object  $o$ ) is, by its very nature, also a moment of *immediate self-awareness* (of  $r$ , and hence also of  $s$ ). But this *equipollence* of awareness and *self-awareness* is not easily recognised by *reflection* which emerges only from their *dissociation*.

As a result of this *dissociation*, and as a medicine against the possibility of infinite regress, there appear meta-considerations and meta-modeling. In the most simple and *precise* formulations, like Tarski's hierarchy of meta-languages or Russell's theory of types, the meta-levels are continued indefinitely. In the more philosophical settings, one terminates the regress by postulating (or discovering) just one (or only a few) level(s) above the basic one from §107.(i), whether it is the level of intelligible forms above the material contents, or else of transcendental subjectivity above the empirical ego. Of course, we do not want to simply conflate all, often very different, variants of this basic idea. But we do claim that various appearances of 'meta' (or 'trans') originate eventually in this basic element: the need of relating *dissociated entities*. Consider, as an example, a simplified hylomorphism. The relation §107.(i), where  $r$  is taken epistemically as something like 'knowing' or 'understanding', is prevented from regress by isolating the intelligible 'form', which reaches directly the *subject*, from the merely perceptible 'matter' which remains on the side of the *object*. The relation  $r$  becomes thus more refined, say, something like: 108.

$$s \xrightarrow{\text{form}} || \xrightarrow{\text{matter}} o \quad (ii)$$

Unlike in the simple-minded case §107.(i), attempting now a self-application of the schema becomes, mildly put, problematic. The problem which is addressed with the form-matter distinction begins with the *dissociated subject* and *object*. The distinction itself, in a sense, prevents one from asking about self-application and infinite regress. And it does so by providing the meta-categories of 'form', 'matter', etc. which, remaining fixed, solve the initial problem.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>142</sup>M. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. Inquiry and intuition; p.126

<sup>143</sup>We view, of course, the distinction itself as a mere consequence of the *dissociation* of *subject* and *object* and would limit its validity (if any) to the sphere of *reflective dissociations*. D. Davidson, *On the very idea of a conceptual scheme* argues against this distinction, the 'third dogma of empiricism', proceeding similarly from the holism which negates the validity of the distinction between the subjective and objective (elements of knowledge). We do not, however, claim the unreality of the subject-object distinction as such, but only its non-absoluteness, its relativity to the sphere of *reflection*.

The most standard version of this distinction assumed the form of the duality of essences, intelligible aspect belonging to the objects, and their reflection as actual concepts in the mind. It made, however, very difficult for the two elements to meet again (unless one sneaked in some form of pre-established harmony between the two.) The solution came with the return of the postulate of unorganised and pure matter, which only mind could endow with any rational form. The subject becomes now (with Kantian idealism) transcendental and responsible for all the formal/rational aspects, leaving on the object side merely sensuous matter (and the purely conceptual, negative rest of a disappearing point, noumenon). It is the above schema (ii) pushed to one extreme:

$$s \xrightarrow{\text{form}} | \text{matter} \quad (\text{iii})$$

The forms (of perception, understanding, reason...) by definition require matter and hence are not self-applicable. The meta-level of transcendental subjectivity giving form to all appearances liberates the original relation  $r$  to the *external object* from the problems of self-reference and infinite regress.

In short, meta-modeling emerges naturally in the reflective attempts to avoid infinite regress, which is only another side of reaching toward the *dissociated, actual object*. However, the very notion of a meta-level is constructed on the top of the *dissociation* and, consequently, can never bring the *dissociated* elements together. The problem returns always with the increased force (even if with less impact) with respect to the meta-level. For if understanding requires sensuous matter, how is it at all possible to understand the very relation of understanding? What is the matter of and what are the categories used in the understanding of the role of the transcendental subject in the process of understanding/constitution? Thus, bringing together subject and object through a meta-relation which, to avoid infinite regress is not self-applicable, introduces the dualism of understanding and non-understandability of this understanding.

109. The thirst for rest, the rest in the otherness of an *object*, unsatisfied by *externality* of any single item, turns easily into superficiality, ‘bad infinity’ which replaces ‘better’ by more. Perhaps, in order to be satisfied, *reflection* has to embrace everything (whatever “embracing” might mean). But nobody can believe that finite *reflection* can grasp the whole richness of the world and all its distinctions. Without admiring Bataille’s vocabulary and metaphors, one can nevertheless easily accept the point that every system must leave some, perhaps even some most significant aspects ‘outside’. Collecting everything into a *reflective totality* is a simple impossibility. The intellectual bias, which accepts only *reflective precision*, together with the associated thirst for the all-embracing universality, turn this intuition into despair, but a despair which is much stronger than that which emerged from the thirst for the ‘original truth’. Now it is almost purely destructive: *reflection* cannot embrace everything – consequently, get rid of *reflection*. This reflective hostility to *reflection*, and perhaps to rationality in general, is but the intellectual form of reflective self-despair, the utmost consequence of the search for rational *precision* and systematic *totality*, which to mere historicism seem to disappear in the past of modernity.

In our language, this argument from finitude amounts to the first aspect of *externalisation*. Just like *distinctions* never reach *nothingness* and *recognitions* never embrace *chaos*, so neither can *reflection* ever stretch as far as (the whole) experience. *Reflection dissociates* an *object* from its background; it is its constitutive *aspect* – not a mere accident. By its very nature, it is finite in this sense: its *object* is *dissociated* from the rest. A *reflection* embracing everything in one act is a self-contradictory notion. And thus, if its goal is to account for all the details of whole experience, *reflection* becomes an unbearable burden, which either has to be *aufgehoben* or else to despair over its insufficiency. If one is not willing to write mere amendments to past and introductions to further investigations, one can be tempted to stop writing in an understandable way and start ‘writing otherwise’.

One can, indeed, start thinking that *reflection*’s only goal is to eradicate itself, is to cease thinking in systematic, logical, understandable, representational, communicable – in short, *reflective* – terms. Instead, renouncing itself, *reflection* should open itself onto all that any system must leave ‘outside’, onto all ‘otherness’ and even ‘otherness as such’, without any presumptuous attempts to control and organise it. Instead of thinking in the old, reflective way, to ‘think otherwise’, to let the absolute ‘otherness’ embrace one in an ecstatic fusion of multiplicity, that is, as everything seems to suggest, of cacophony. This delirium is, as a matter of fact, only the final, disappointed

stage of the failed search for the ‘original truth’. Since the detailed richness of experience cannot be reflected in a *totality* of a system, and since system anyhow is alien to our life, stop thinking system and start ‘thinking otherwise’.

The sensed inadequacy of distinguishing ‘form’ from ‘matter’, ‘act’ from its ‘content’, turns into a fashionable habit of identifying ‘truth’ with the ‘expression of truth’ which, in turn, introduces the ambiguity as to whether one denounces the former or the latter; whether one wants to say that “there is no truth” or “there is no proper expression of truth”. In the first case one gets a more existential despair of nihilism which, apparently, does not attempt to look for the lost innocence. In the latter, one would be more consistent staying quiet rather than shouting. In any case, one does reject the gullible simplicity of the system in favor of ‘supra-reflective’ and ‘extra rational’ ecstasy. Yet, it is hard (and we would claim, impossible) to assume the existential attitude of ‘there is no truth’ and those who seem to have assumed it, seem also to have done it because they cannot find any ‘proper expression of truth’.

And indeed, lacking any proper expression, we hear many calling us to ‘speak otherwise’ and ‘think otherwise’. But isn’t this call, this attempt to break the barriers and reach beyond, actually very similar to the search for the original truth of lost innocence? The thirst to “get rid of one’s personal ego and become embraced by the otherness which one believes to be one’s essence”<sup>144</sup> is, according to Durkheim, a characteristic sign of the ‘altruistic suicide’; a suicide committed with the best intentions for the others’ sake and good, but still only a suicidal self-destruction. Although one may suffer from various forms of *alienation* and attempt to overcome them, such attempts may often turn into even more advanced forms of estrangement, especially, when their goal is to overcome *every distance* separating one from others and to immerse reflection completely into the ‘otherness’ of ... its world-object.

Now, “one may believe that authentic time is an ecstasy; yet, one buys oneself a watch.” One may believe that the depths of our being (or non-being, as nothing really is, or ~~being~~) are permeated with uncontrolled and inexpressible openness; yet one goes around *one’s own* business and tries to express *one’s own* needs and thoughts in a comprehensible way. For even if the *foundation* of communication rests in the *invisible* depths, the communication itself happens *hic et nunc*, in the midst of plain *actuality* or ... not at all. There may be some religious or mystical truths inexpressible in the plain language. But to speak such a language one better have some such insights to communicate.

There is no such thing as ‘thinking otherwise’, there are not different kinds of thinking just like there are different kinds of formal logics. To be sure, there is non-thinking; there are also other modes of approaching reality, perhaps, with their own logic. But whenever we encounter a human being with whom we can communicate, we can also understand, even if only imperfectly, his thinking – and that *not in spite of* it being ‘his’ but *because* it is ‘thinking’. There is always a space for failures and misunderstandings, and there is always, even primarily, a space for other forms of communication. But anthropologists also do understand *thinking* of strange tribes, just like a German can understand *thinking* of a Chinese.<sup>145</sup> Speaking otherwise, thinking otherwise, writing and acting otherwise may be, indeed, egotic needs of adolescence trying to find and mark its place in the world. Among the adults, ecstatic intensity, like the intensity of madness, may be seen only, and only at best, as an attempted medicine. Against what? As it appears here, against its own nature which having become unbearable, tries to become something ‘other’. But there is no otherness without sameness and without self-respect one is unable to respect anybody else.

### 5.2.2. The objectivistic attitude, the subjectivistic illusion.

A disease attacks and eventually affects only those whose constitution exposes them to its effects, a virus deadly to humans may happen to be harmless to monkeys or rats. Various diseases of

<sup>144</sup>E. Durkheim, *The Suicide*. IV:1

<sup>145</sup>Say, Eliade did understand something of the ‘primitive’ religious *thinking* and even made some of us understand something of it, that is, understand that it is not primitive but that it, too, is thinking. We need not, though of course we would like to multiply the quotations from Lévi-Strauss like that “the savage mind is in my intention only a meeting place, a result of an attempt to understand taken up by ‘me’ putting myself in ‘their’ place and by ‘them’ put by me in ‘my’ place.” [C. Lévi-Strauss, *Réponses à quelques questions*.] Referring to the study of South-American mythology in C. Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*: “it concerns understanding how the human mind works. [...] If the method is worth anything it will also allow one to exceed the South-American limits and reach a general experience.” [R. Bellour, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*.]

reflection have a sound basis in human being, in the very emergence of reflection as such, and in its relation to the deeper levels of experience. The primary problem of, and then also for, reflection is that it tends to conflate its own mode with the being of the human person and thus, for instance, consider all the relations to the world as if they were simple (though reflectively always inexplicable) relations of the *subject-object* kind.

112. The unlimited power of reflection consists in the universal *possibility* of turning anything whatsoever into an *object*, of using a *sign*, often just a word, in order to bring something within the *horizon of actual observation* and inquiry. It is possible for the ‘I think that ...’ to be added to all my recognitions.<sup>146</sup> It is possible to turn every *recognition* into an isolated *representation*, to posit every aspect of experience, even one which never is a thematic *object* of any experience, as the *actual theme of reflection*.

This power, due to its universality, lies however at the bottom of *objectivistic attitude* or, equivalently, *subjectivistic illusion*.<sup>147</sup> It consists in mistaking the universal possibility for the universal reality: that ‘everything can be made into an *object*’, that everything can, as a *sign*, appear within the *horizon of actuality*, is replaced by ‘everything *is an actual object*’. The horizon of experience is identified with the horizon of reflection, the entire world becomes merely a *totality of objects*, its multiple levels and dimensions are reduced to the *objectivity* appearing in reflective dissociations.

113. The non-actual aspect of an *object* has itself an *objective* character. If I see a building, while actually I am only seeing its front-side, its back-side is also meant (*gemeint*); and it might be my *object* too. What distinguishes here the given *sign* from its rest, the front-side from the back-side, is the mere fact that the former is actually within the *horizon of actuality*, while the latter is here only possibly – actually it is not, but it might be.

But is it? Its possible *actuality* is, as a matter of fact, its present non-*actuality*. As Husserl shows, it is there, is an integral part of the experience, but it is there in a different way than the *actual* aspect. Turning the non-*actuality* of the building’s back-side into a ‘potentiality’, we have already assumed the *objectivistic attitude*, we have already falsified the way in which it is given and projected into it the assumed *objectivity*.

It is, however, obvious that the back-side of the house, although not actually given now, can be so given if I only go round the house. It is non-actual now but it is not *essentially non-actual*. The situation becomes more dramatic when I try to reflect over the world, God, love, life, even only the two weeks in Prague. It isn’t common to call such things “objects” because, as a matter of fact, they are not. They make me acutely aware that what I am positing and grasping is a mere *sign*. It is hard to imagine that the ‘missing parts’ can ever be given in full *actuality*; to begin with, it is completely unclear what they possibly might be. The *objectivistic attitude* will nevertheless stick to the conviction that they, too, are *objects*; that if we only travel enough, we will see all that is to see of the world, if we only analyse enough, we will embrace everything into our *representation*, if we only think and reflect enough, we will eventually discover all the hidden aspects of love, meaning, hate. And if they are not themselves *objects*, then they are at least amenable to an *objective* description, they are *subjective* categories (impressions, experiences, illusions) which are reducible to the *objective* ones.

Visible *objects*, “reasons, seen from afar, appear to limit our view; but when they are reached, we begin to see beyond.”<sup>148</sup> The process of analysis and reduction is even by its proponents recognised as potentially infinite. All the declarations of infinity of the process of analysing and gaining knowledge, all the mere ‘prolegomena’ and ‘introductions’ one keeps writing in the hope that others will carry on the research, are expressions of this attitude attempting to view the whole world and experience as a mere *totality of visible actualities*.

One might think that we are not looking for ‘all possible aspects’ but only for the eventual ‘essences’. This, however, is the same and no better. *Objectivistic attitude* postulates the ‘essences’ as surrogates for the missing *objectivity*. Unable to grasp higher things (nor, for that

<sup>146</sup>It is only possible because this amounts to an act of *reflective dissociation* which constitutes *representation*. This ‘I think’ is thus not the ‘primitive apperception’ which “must accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought;” [I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. I:2.I.1.2.2.Transcendental Deduction of the Pure Concepts... (edn. B)]. Kantian apperception corresponds rather to our (self-)awareness which *found*s the possibility of the reflective ‘I think’.

<sup>147</sup>Sure, one may use phrases like “forgetfulness of Being” or “metaphysics of actuality”.

<sup>148</sup>B. Pascal, *Pensées*. IV:262

matter, the source of *objects*' identity and independence) under the actual spell of its *objectivistic* look, it tries to replace them with something which would be eligible to such a look and treatment. 'Essences' or 'concepts' are means of doing that (and we will say more about them in Book II:1.2.2). Intelligible object turns into essence, matter turns into form, and in the midst of the triumphant *objectivity* there emerges again the *subject* which, as a matter of fact, has never disappeared. Total 'objectivism' and ultimate 'solipsism' are distinguishable only on the basis of the reflective dualism from which they are projected. Each sacrifices one aspect for the other and the border between the two is easy to draw only in the most abstract terms when one does not ask about any consequences. In fact, both live only by negating the other aspect and are but absolutisation of the dualism from which they arise: both see only *actualities*. We will therefore use the expressions "*objectivistic/subjectivistic attitude/illusion*" interchangeably.

The search for *more* experiences and for *more* intense experiences driving one around the world is, at bottom, the same as the search for *more* knowledge of particular things, places, peoples, even of scientific results. As far as they search for *more*, whether in the *objective* or *subjective* aspect, they assume that all that is is a *totality* of things from which one gets less unless one grasps for *more*. Insatiability – this intellectual (but also quite practical) equivalent of avarice – is a cardinal sin because it treats the world in a flattened, purely extensional manner, where *more* becomes equivalent with better. And, as already Greeks taught, *hubris* is always followed by *nemesis*.<sup>149</sup>

The power of *subjectivistic illusion* has a firm grounding in the *actuality of reflection*. Wherever I travel in the world, I do not encounter new unexpected modes of vision – whether in Paris or London, I encounter new buildings, new people, new roads. Well, I may encounter new ways of seeing the world and new attitudes, but they all are of the same character as the ones I could, at least in principle, contemplate at home (a German can understand a Chinese). And *reflection* will only encounter new *objects* even if it in fact searches for something else. "Life is, however, rich enough when one only can see; one need not travel to Paris and London – and that does not help, when one can not see."<sup>150</sup> No matter how long one thinks and reflectively analyses a phenomenon, one does not encounter any *qualitatively new* modes of presentation. All the new aspects and observations one encounters are of the same character – they present one with new *objects* (*subjective* feelings and mere *actual* impressions are, at bottom, *external objects* and in any case never bring one out of the circle of *reflective actuality*). They leave one, perhaps pleased, but deeply unsatisfied. The more intensely *reflection* tries to grasp the 'essence', the more it gets entangled into the *objectivistic attitude*. Analyses become longer and longer, books thicker and thicker and the essence more and more evanescent.

### 5.2.3. Antinomies of actuality

The *objectivistic attitude*, viewing every *non-actual unity* as a mere *totality*, gives rise to innumerable antinomies or, at least, illegitimate questions resulting from applying wrong categories in wrong contexts. These are analogues of the limitations of pure reason expressed in Kant's antinomies.<sup>151</sup> In our case, these are antinomies of *actuality*, of applying the categories of *actual*

<sup>149</sup> Intellectual insatiability finds also its expression in the more direct thirst for power. Platon's state of philosophers is an invention of *reflection* dreaming about its own power (in a way one might expect from a failed and disappointed politician). Faustus, realising that the ultimate power does not reside in the books of Aristotle or Galen, of physics or medicine, renounces them for magic, necromancy and Mephostophilis' promises – only there he can still expect the "world of profit and delight, // Of power, of honour, of omnipotence." [C. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*. I:51-52] Elderly professors seeking political, or at least academic, power and influence can be probably mentioned, too. Possible differences in the ethical evaluation of so unlike phenomena notwithstanding, one can discern in all of them an element of *reflection* and intelligence seeking universalisation of its own principle, seeking power.

<sup>150</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*. p.109. "Traveling on every path, you will not find the boundaries of soul by going – so deep is its measure." [Heraclitus DK 22B45] "An ass which turns a millstone did a hundred miles walking. When it was loosed, it found that it was still at the same place. There are men who make many journeys, but make no progress towards any destination. When evening came upon them, they saw neither city nor village, neither human artifact nor natural phenomenon, power nor angel. In vain have the wretches labored." [*The Gospel of Philip*.] Hysterical tourism, search for the 'exotic and undiscovered' corners of the world, are only common modern forms of the attempts to fill the emptiness of *objectivity* and boredom of *subjectivity* through more 'openness to otherness'.

<sup>151</sup> As usual, the story is old and long. The relativisation of reason to the visible world became quite explicit with neo-Platonism and the confrontation of Judaic and Christian faith with the Greek rationalism in negative theology. Maimonides, Albert the Great, Aquinas considered reason incapable not only of grasping God but also of answering

representation to things, experiences and aspects of experience which can not be compressed to fit into *horizon of actuality*. The danger for such antinomies arises whenever reflection posits an ideal *object*, in the sense explained in §103.

According to Kant, antinomies arise because one posits a possible series of experiential distinctions as unconditionally complete. Applying his machinery, he makes us “select out those categories which necessarily lead to a series in the synthesis of the manifold,”<sup>152</sup> arriving at the four cosmological ideas of absolute completeness with the respective antinomies of: composition (limited vs. limitless world in time and space), division (infinite vs. finite divisibility of any substance), origination (determinism vs. freedom in the universe) and dependence (existence vs. non existence of a necessary being).

In our language, all these can be seen as examples of *positing as object* something which inherently isn’t one, *positing* something *non-actual*, or even *non-actual*, as *actually given*.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, what is so *posited* is, at the same time, itself thought as a collection or series of *objects*. Thus something which in *experience* arises before the *reflective objects*, is attempted thought in terms of the *objective* categories, a *non-actual unity* is attempted modeled as a *totality*. The unavoidability of antinomies is just an effect of the universal possibility of turning anything into an *object of reflection*. Kant makes the absolute distinction between appearances and ‘things in themselves’ to make illegitimate the questions leading to the antinomies. We only say: there are other modes of *experience* than the *objective, reflective* one. The *totalities* postulated as here *objects* often do have some counterparts in *experience*, but not in the *objective experience*.

116. Kant insists that these four are all and only antinomies – this fits nicely the table of categories. But antinomies, more or less similar to the above ones, are not limited to *positing* the ultimate *totalities*, to the paradoxes of the absolute limits and the associated self-reference. They arise whenever we try to *posit* an inherently *non-actual* reality as an *object*. Its *non-actuality* becomes then a collection of other *objects* and the *posited object* itself a perplexing one-many.

*Posit* any feeling as an *actual object*. Is it determined or is it free? Both and neither (it is not completely without reason but any reason one might find is not sufficient). Is it one thing or many? Both and neither (it is this feeling and not that, but it also comprises other feelings, more specific moods, moments, perceptions). Did it have a beginning or not? Both and neither (it must have started some time because it did not last always, but it did not start at any definite moment). All other kinds of unanswerable, that is, *objective* questions are possible. Is it or is it not the same feeling as I had two weeks ago? Which *x* makes it different from that other feeling? Where does the one end and the other begin? Countless antinomies can be produced, once it is assumed that all that is are *objects*.

The very antinomy of subject-object arises from the attempts to think the underlying *unity* in terms of the reflectively *dissociated* poles. One first *posits* a subject and an object as two completely *dissociated* entities – both, in fact, imagined as *objects* – and then scratches one’s head over the question how they possibly might have anything to do with each other. Beginning with the *dissociated* poles, one can only end up reducing one to the other – any *unity* respecting the genuine distinctness of the two must appear as *transcending* the *dissociation*, that is, as something ‘mystical’ beyond the admissible categories. Most generally, antinomies arise as a result of applying the categories, that is, *distinctions* of lower levels to various higher aspects of *experience* – eventually, the categories of *visibility* to the sphere of *invisibles*.<sup>154</sup> We look at a couple examples which will also be of some relevance for later considerations.

---

the question about the creation of the world vs. its eternal existence. A bit earlier, Al-Ghazali denied reason’s ability to deal with things outside the horizon of our experience.

<sup>152</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. A415/B442

<sup>153</sup>It might seem that this is opposite to Kant’s diagnosis, according to which antinomy “arises from our applying to appearances that exist only in our representations, and therefore, so far as they form a series, not otherwise than in a successive regress, that idea of absolute totality which holds only as a condition of things in themselves.” [I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. I:2nd Division.2.Book 2.2.7 [A506/B534]] But *positing as object* can be equally described as such an application of *unity* to a mere *totality*, in fact, the very *totality* itself is already such an application.

<sup>154</sup>We do not distinguish ‘categories’ from ‘concepts’ or, for that matter, ‘patterns of understanding’ from ‘understanding particular things’. We will say a few words about the issue in Book II, but all such forms are just particular cases of (drawing) *distinctions*.

### 5.2.3.i. Matter vs. spirit

The *dissociation* of *subject* and *object* draws its pervasive power from the obvious experience of the duality, perhaps even opposition, of mind and body. But when pushed to the extremes of metaphysical principles, it turns into an irreconcilable dualism of spirit vs. matter, and of the associated ‘attributes’, like active vs. passive, eternal vs. temporal, higher vs. lower, etc., etc., etc...

Plato takes probably the first place, *dissociating* the world into the sensible and the intelligible when following the Orphic and Pythagorean tradition of opposing body to soul.<sup>155</sup> But Plato carries the *dissociation* of moral character into the metaphysical opposition of the ‘material’ and the ‘spiritual’.

“Suppose a person to make all kinds of figures of gold and to be always transmuting one form into all the rest – somebody points to one of them and asks what it is. By far the safest and truest answer is, That is gold; and not to call the triangle or any other figures which are formed in the gold “these”, as though they had existence, since they are in process of change while he is making the assertion; but if the questioner be willing to take the safe and indefinite expression, “such”, we should be satisfied. And the same argument applies to the universal nature which receives all bodies – that must be always called the same; for, while receiving all things, she never departs at all from her own nature, and never in any way, or at any time, assumes a form like that of any of the things which enter into her; she is the natural recipient of all impressions, and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which enter into and go out of her are the likenesses of real existences modeled after their patterns in wonderful and inexplicable manner.”<sup>156</sup>

This is a perfect example of ‘analogical reasoning’, or perhaps just ‘analogical modeling’. The trivial *distinction* of *actuality* between the material from which a thing is made and the thing itself, is applied to the ‘universal nature’, which is *posited* as an indistinct substratum *receiving* possible forms; the *dissociation* of purpose and achievement, plan and its execution, which is close to constitutive for the daily acts and activities, is elevated to the principle of the highest level. Thus ‘matter’ becomes “formless, and free from the impress of any of these shapes which it is hereafter to receive from without. For if the matter were like any of the supervening forms, then whenever any opposite or entirely different nature was stamped upon its surface, it would take the impression badly, because it would intrude its own shape. Wherefore, that which is to receive all forms should have no form;”<sup>157</sup> And due to its passivity and receptivity, it is in a bad need of something else, of an external principle, “that of which the thing generated is a resemblance.”<sup>158</sup>

Students of Aristotle are well acquainted with the difficulties to sort out what the Philosopher actually says in *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *Categories* concerning matter. There seems to be a difference between ‘matter’ and the ‘ultimate substratum’ (*materia prima*), though it is not clearly articulated.<sup>159</sup> Matter is supposed to individuate the forms but, on the other hand, being completely formless it is itself in a dear need of being individuated – it “desires the form”. Living beings are unquestionably substances, but then, as composed of form and matter, some more basic substance should be present as well. It is common to consider for instance *Metaphysics* VII:3

<sup>155</sup>E.g., Plato, in *Cratylus* refers Orphic views: “Some say that the body is a tomb of the soul, as being buried in it for the present life. And because the soul expresses (*semainei*) by this body (*soma*) whatever it may wish to express, so it is rightly called a tomb (*sema*). The Orphics, in particular, seem to have given it this name, as they think the soul suffers punishment for its misdeeds.” Pythagorean Philolaus quoted by Clement: “The ancient theologians and seers testify that the soul is conjoined to the body to suffer certain punishments, and is, as it were, buried in this tomb.” [DK 44B14 [after St. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*. III:3.17] ]

<sup>156</sup>Plato, *Timaeus*. 18

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid.

<sup>159</sup>Thus, for instance, “The matter comes to be and ceases to be in one sense, while in another it does not. As that which contains the privation, it ceases to be in its own nature, for what ceases to be – the privation – is contained within it. But as potentiality it does not cease to be in its own nature, but is necessarily outside the sphere of becoming and ceasing to be.” [Aristotle, *Physics*. I:9] The quotations supporting either view could be multiplied. For us the relevant thing is not which one is correct but that it is impossible to agree on that. The very question whether Aristotle is committed to assume a characterless *materia prima* or not is impossible to settle (e.g., F. A. Lewis, *Substance and Predication in Aristotle* argues for, while M. Furth, *Substance, Form and Psyche: An Aristotelean Metaphysics*, T. Scaltsas, *Substances and Universals in Aristotle’s Metaphysics* against his commitment to such a notion.)

as denying substantiality to matter<sup>160</sup>, but one can also present reasonable arguments for the opposite view according to which Aristotle, at least in some sense, considers (the prime) matter to be substance.<sup>161</sup> Distinguishing subjects of change from subjects of predication (or logical subjects) does not help much because matter seems the ultimate subject of change, and such subjects are also subjects of predication.

119. The history of ‘matter’ in the following philosophical tradition is a continuation of this ‘analogical thinking’ which establishes a relative *distinction* as something ultimate. ‘Matter’ is always an ideal posited by *objectivistic illusion* on analogy with the ‘stuff from which physical things are made’. But when extrapolated beyond the limits of *actuality* as the primordial substance and first principle of the universe, the matter becomes “an incomprehensible somewhat, which hath none of those particular qualities whereby the bodies falling under our senses are distinguished from one another”<sup>162</sup> or, for that matter, from anything else.

To be sure, ‘spirit’ as the similarly ultimate principle opposed to ‘matter’, is an equally empty result of the same absolutisation of relative aspects, of raising some properties of the *actually dissociated subject* to the level of the ultimate principle. We can admire Berkeley’s arguments but not the attempts to reduce the opposition to one of its terms. Granting primacy to ‘spirit’ over ‘matter’ is as good as doing it the other way around. In either case what is left is only some contentless and propertyless void, while one remains involved into the dualism – if not of the claimed elements, so in any case of the used concepts, of ‘spirit’ opposed to and abolishing ‘matter’ or vice versa.<sup>163</sup>

120. ‘Matter’, when posited as anything more than the physicality (*externality*) of particular *actual objects* perceived by the senses (“designate matter” as some Scholastics would say), simply dissolves losing all its supposed ‘intrinsic’, ‘objective’ qualities. “For my definition of matter is just this – the primary substratum of each thing, from which it comes to be without qualification, and which persists in the result.”<sup>164</sup> To save such a vacuous residuum from total non-being, one has to take recourse to very special distinctions. For instance, “we distinguish matter and privation, and hold that one of these, namely the matter, is not-being only in virtue of an attribute which it has, while the privation in its own nature is not-being; and that the matter is nearly, in a sense is, substance, while the privation in no sense is.”<sup>165</sup> Perhaps privation is just ‘stripping off’ while matter is what remains when “all else is stripped off”, but “being nearly”, “being in a sense” substance, etc., (without actually being it) suggest, if nothing more, then at least that language reaches its limit in expressing the difference between the primary substratum and the pure negativity.

A more empirically minded might ask: is matter (composed of) atoms, elementary particles, quarks? The recent word in the chain is “strings”.<sup>166</sup> But then one also knows that  $E = mc^2$ , that matter is exchangeable with energy, is but a form of energy. So what is energy...? We won’t say that it is the “secret fire of the alchemists, or phlogiston, or the heat-force inherent in matter, like the ‘primal warmth’ of the Stoics, or the Heraclitean ‘ever-living fire’, which borders on the primitive notion of an all-pervading vital force, a power of growth and magic healing that is generally called *mana*.<sup>167</sup> No, we won’t say that. But what shall we say then...? We are not trying to ridicule the hard and thorough attempts of the physicists’ to mathematise physics. Their relevance to our philosophy is nil any way. But they, too, end up dissolving ‘matter’ in something

---

<sup>160</sup>E.g., R. J. Blackwell, *Matter as a subject of predication in Aristotle*, R. Rorty, *Genus as matter: a reading of Metaphysics Z-H*, V. Chappell, *Matter*

<sup>161</sup>E.g., J. Kung, *Can substance be predicated of matter?*.

<sup>162</sup>G. Berkeley, *A Treatise....* §47

<sup>163</sup>The remark applies also to somewhat ingenious construction offered by the Stoics who, denying any transcendent principles and spiritual entities, distinguished two aspects – or perhaps kinds – of matter: the active and the passive, the forming and the formed one. “In themselves both are the same; it is the same being of which a part assumes the form of the world, while another retains its original form and in that shape appears as the moving cause or the Deity.” [E. Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*. [after W. Szczesna, *The Concept of Eternal Return....*]] We could probably find here quite a few analogies to our presentation if only we were willing to ignore the ever present and dominating opposition of the two aspects.

<sup>164</sup>Aristotle, *Physics*. I:9

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>The word goes that strings as if vibrate, with different amplitudes – doubtlessly, to an extreme delight of neo-Pythagoreans.

<sup>167</sup>C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. I:68

entirely un-matter-like.

'Matter' is an image, a *symbol*. Of what? Ha! It intends to stand for the *external objectivity* 121. raised to the level of the *absolute*. But then it turns into the truly *absolute indistinctness*. On the one hand, it resides in every *external object*, so one asks more and more specific questions – atoms? quarks? strings? – in search for the limit of the *distinctions*, for the most *immediate* in the hierarchy of Being: the simple and indivisible. On the other hand, as the universal substratum, the always formed formless, it is, again, the limit of *distinctions*, namely, the ever *indistinct*. The two limits seem to coincide, for beyond the limit of *distinctions* there remains only the ultimate rest, the *indistinct*.

If one can form any concept of 'matter' at all, it is simply that of the *indistinct*. As the formless, confused, *indistinct* it is, indeed, the principle of individuation simply because it is the same as the *origin*, the *one*. It must not be confused with any particular *distinctions*, whether quarks, energy, or *actual* material things. As Berkeley argues, ascribing any properties to some *posited* 'outside', some independent 'matter', brings it immediately into the relativity to the one who performs such an ascribing. All particular properties (of matter or whatever) arise from the *origin* through the *invisible* process of *creation* which, gradually, takes more and more familiar, human form.

The image of something "which remains when all else is stripped off"<sup>168</sup> is as easy to posit as difficult to maintain. In the language of substances and accidents it must, indeed, emerge as the ultimate substance. But substances have been earlier given the status of independent – and, in particular, individual – existents. Such 'something' – an individual, independent existent above all temporal distinctions – might perhaps be thought of not as 'matter' but rather as ... well, 'spirit'. The primordial *distinctions*, the first acts of creation, do not introduce 'matter' as opposed to 'spirit', 'body' as opposed to 'mind' – birth separates *self* from the *one* and the following *chaos* of *distinctions* does not single out any of them as more basic, more fundamental; it does not even oppose one to another. So far, that is all; there is as yet no structure, which the *distinction* 'matter'-'spirit', not to mention 'body'-'mind', presupposes. Before *subject* gets *dissociated* from the *object*, before 'spirit' gets *dissociated* from 'matter' and 'mind' from 'body', there is still only the *nexus of chaos*, where Being and Thinking are not two different things, not even two different things which mysteriously happen to coincide, but just one, as yet undifferentiated *nexus*.

If one wanted to discern some 'materialism' here, it would amount simply to saying that the stuff from which 'mind' is made is the same as the stuff from which stars and galaxies are made, 'mind' and 'body' are made from the same *one*. But in the moment one thinks of the *one* as 'matter' (whatever one might mean by that) which is distinct from, perhaps even opposed to anything whatsoever, one has already gone too far, for one has projected some *distinctions* onto the *indistinct*. If, on the other hand, one says that 'matter' is the same as *one*, then one has said nothing about the 'matter' and merely used a hardly appropriate name for the *one*.

Perhaps, what we have described as the "antinomy" of spirit-matter is but a special case of 122. Kantian fourth antinomy. If a Kantian wishes, he probably might see it this way. But there seems to be a significant difference between our use of the word "antinomy" and its Kantian version. An application of lower *distinctions* to higher spheres of Being need not, by necessity, result in a conflict of reason as sharp as Kant illustrates it. *Dissociation* of spirit and matter, natural and easy as it is at the level of *reflection* and *experience* may be turned into an apparent contradiction when transferred to the level of *chaos* or *nothingness*. But there are other ways of coping with *dissociated* oppositions. The simplest is just admitting the existence of incompatible metaphysical entities, although a more common is to admit only one and refuse the other. Whether such solutions are satisfying – to one's reason – will depend on how one wants to define reason. But answers, if any, can hardly be given in terms of *dissociated objectivities* which are exactly what is responsible for the antinomic character of the questions. Calling them "antinomies" suggests that they need not be considered true problems but rather results of a category mistake, of applying right *distinctions* in wrong context. But to accept such a suggestion, *reflection* has to admit that its *objective* categories and plain *visibilities* do not exhaust the field of meaningful answers, that it "is benefited by the examination of a subject on both sides, and its judgments are corrected by being limited. [...] For it is perfectly permissible to employ, in the presence of reason, the

<sup>168</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. VII:3 [modified]

language of a firmly rooted faith, even after we have been obliged to renounce all pretensions to knowledge.”<sup>169</sup>

### 5.2.3.ii. God vs. matter

123. The opposition can be pushed even further into the transcendent sphere where no longer ‘spirit’, but the ultimate God or One stands on the other side, opposing matter. It is really only a continuation of the previous antinomy but it makes the ‘matter’-‘spirit’ equivocity, which creeps in with a recurrent insistence, painfully clear and deeply unpleasant.

“By *X* I mean that which in itself is neither a particular thing nor of a certain quantity nor assigned to any other of the categories by which being is determined.[...] Therefore *X* is of itself neither a particular thing nor of a particular quantity nor otherwise positively characterised; nor yet is it the negations of these, for negations also will belong to it only by accident.” It would not be offending to negative theologians if both *X*’s were replaced by “God”. In the text “matter” stands for the first and “ultimate substratum” for the second one.<sup>170</sup>

Plotinus on The One: “The One, as transcending Intellect, transcends knowing: above all need, it is above the need of the knowing which pertains solely to the Secondary Nature. Knowing is a unitary thing, but defined: the first is One, but undefined: a defined One would not be the One-absolute: the absolute is prior to the definite. [...] Thus The One is in truth beyond all statement: any affirmation is of a thing; but the all-transcending, resting above even the most august divine Mind, possesses alone of all true being, and is not a thing among things; we can give it no name because that would imply predication”<sup>171</sup> The image of matter is more familiar: “We utterly eliminate every kind of Form; and the object in which there is none whatever we call Matter: if we are to see Matter we must so completely abolish Form that we take shapelessness into our very selves.”<sup>172</sup> It is hard not to see the analogy, and so the fragment continues: “In fact it is another Intellectual-Principle, not the true, this which ventures a vision so uncongenial.” Matter is ‘not the true’ first hypostasis but almost, it is not being but “By this Non-Being, of course, we are not to understand something that simply does not exist, but only something of an utterly different order from Authentic-Being.”<sup>173</sup> It seems that, if nothing more, then at least the language reaches its limit in expressing the difference between the absolute One and the pure negativity of matter (cf. §120). But why should language express differences which cannot be thought and which, perhaps, simply do not obtain?

Just one more example. The tension – of analogous descriptions of preferably opposite extremes – was clearly observed by Eriugena: “there are two, and two only, that cannot be defined, God and matter. For God is without limit and without form since He is formed by none, being the Form of all things. Similarly matter is without form and without limit, for it needs to be formed and limited from elsewhere, while in itself it is not form but something that can receive form.”<sup>174</sup> “And this similarity between the Cause of all things [...] and this unformed cause – I mean matter [...] is understood in contrary sense. For the supreme Cause of all things is without form and limit because of its eminence above all forms and limits.[...] Matter, on the other hand, is called formless by reason of its being deprived of all forms. For by it nothing is formed, but it receives different forms.”<sup>175</sup> This opposition notwithstanding, there is even a further similarity. “Matter itself, if one examines it carefully, is also built up from of incorporeal qualities.”<sup>176</sup> “Formless matter is the mutability of mutable things, receptive of all forms.”<sup>177</sup> “[...] I think, that if it can be understood at all, it is perceived only by the intellect.” The ‘intellect’, let us emphasize, not in the derogatory sense which it often obtains in the modern expressions like “mere intellectualism” or “intellectuals”, but in the sense of *nous* or *logos*, in the sense which it acquired from neo-Platonism, through the Church Fathers to the Scholastics, as the highest faculty of the soul which remains in the closest vicinity of Godhead and perceives the immediate works of God, the first stages of creation, the

<sup>169</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. II:1.2 [A745/B773]

<sup>170</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII:3

<sup>171</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:3.12-13

<sup>172</sup>Ibid. I:1.10

<sup>173</sup>Ibid. I:1.3

<sup>174</sup>J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. I:499D;499-500A

<sup>175</sup>Ibid. II:167-169

<sup>176</sup>Ibid. II:133

<sup>177</sup>after St. Augustine, *Confessions* XII:6

primordial causes.<sup>178</sup>

In short, ‘matter’ which “is negatively defined as not being any one of the things that are”<sup>179</sup> is 124. very hard to distinguish from “the One which is beyond thought [and] surpasses the apprehension of thought, [...] the Universal Ground of existence while Itself existing not, for It is beyond all Being.”<sup>180</sup> Conceptual distinctions can be posited to maintain a kind of orthodoxy or good conscience but both turn out to be just... nothing. The apophatic language of the divine, just like the negative descriptions of the ultimate substratum, leave only the all-transcending, indefinite and *indistinct*. Indeed, as the ‘analogical modeling’ of God never managed to go beyond the image of a handyman busing himself with transforming raw materials into more or less pleasing and useful artifacts, the two – formal and material cause – had to be found also in the *indistinct*. (Attempts to philosophise over the divine Trinity might easily lead in the same direction of differentiating the *absolute*.) One had to distinguish the indistinguishable.<sup>181</sup>

As we saw in the quoted passages, ‘matter’ is in all respects like ‘God’ – only with a huge negative sign making it actually the opposite of ‘God’. The experience of the *actual dissociation* of subject and object and extended to the opposition ‘spirit’-‘matter’ finds the anthropomorphic, in the most negative sense, expression in ascribing ‘power’, ‘activity’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘universality’ or the like to ‘God’ and, on the other hand, mere ‘potency’, ‘formlessness’, ‘materiality’, confusion and on the top of that – at least until Duns Scotus pointed clearly out the involved impossibilities<sup>182</sup> – the ‘individuating’ potential to *materia prima* or, as the alchemists would say, *materia confusa*.

This dualism projected into the *indistinct* carries moral dimension. Certainly, the calmness of 125. humble and dedicated contemplation can easily be opposed to the abruptness of sudden passions, the certainty of deep convictions to the unrest of hollow feelings. In an exaggerated and simplified form, the goodness of the soul is opposed to the corrupting influences of the body and, stretching this movement ‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’, one ends with the ultimate ‘Good’ on the one hand and the ultimate ‘Evil’ on the other. As God becomes a mere limit of perfections, the ‘most eminent’, ‘more-than-...’, the active supra-Cause, an incomprehensible *totality* of positive aspects and predicates, so there arises a deep need for the corresponding negative principle, and ‘matter’ fills this need. “As necessarily as there is Something after the First, so necessarily there is a Last: this Last is Matter, the thing which has no residue of good in it: here is the necessity of Evil. [...] Matter becomes mistress of what is manifested through it: it corrupts and destroys the incomer”<sup>183</sup>.

<sup>178</sup>One should always be wary of the distinction between these two kinds which both may be called “intellect”: “It is our separating habit that sets the one order before the other: for there is a separating intellect, of another order than the true, distinct from the intellect, inseparable and unseparating, which is Being and the universe of things.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:9.8]

<sup>179</sup>J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. II:141

<sup>180</sup>Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*. I:1

<sup>181</sup>The story is both long and has many turns. One of the more interesting may be found, as indicated by the above quotations, in Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*. According to the different ways of predication being or non-being listed in the opening sections, God is nothingness – but on account of excellence or infinity, *nihil per excellentiam* or *per infinitatem*, while matter is nothingness through privation, *nihil per privationem*. In the platonising school of the XII-th century Chartres, Clarembald of Arras had to stress the distinction between two senses of the “indistinct” (or “indifferent”): it can be understood “in one way as possibility, in another as the unity of substance” [Clarembald of Arras, *The Gloss on Boethius’ “De Trinitate”*. I:§§19-23], i.e., either as the mere potentiality of formless matter, or as the ultimate simplicity of God which also unites things. Others had to distinguish, for instance, the ‘negatively undetermined’, that is, incapable of being determined transcendence of God, and the ‘privatively undetermined’, that is, the general concept of a (created) ‘being’ which is abstracted by the mind but is determinable and always exists only in a more definite form [Henry of Ghent, *Summa Theologica* XXIV:q6. Henry considered nevertheless the two to be completely distinct concepts, confused only by the mind due to their similarity.]; the ‘simply simple’, the indivisibility which is not resolvable into essential elements, like *materia prima*, and ‘not simply simple’ or ‘most highly simple’ which, as a perfection of unity belonging to God, must admit also other perfections. [St. Bonaventura, *Commentaries on the Four Books...* I:d7.2.q1, J. Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* II:d3.1.q6.]

<sup>182</sup>J. Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* II:d3.1.q5-6. A bit earlier, Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* V:8, objected to viewing matter as the principle of individuation and suggested a property of *suppositum*, i.e., individual, which however was not any positive reality as it were to become with Scotus. It was only a negative property and proximate cause of individuation, distinct from matter which still was the ultimate (or remote) cause of multiplicity.

<sup>183</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. I:1.7,9 [The image of matter as a harlot is also invoked by Maimonides: “How wonderfully wise is the simile of King Solomon, in which he compares matter to a faithless wife: for matter is never found without form, and is therefore always like such a wife who is never without a husband, never single; and yet, though being wedded, constantly seeks another man in the place of her husband: she entices and attracts him in every possible manner till he obtains from her what her husband has obtained. The same is the case with matter [...] the substance of dust and darkness, the source of all defect and loss.”] [M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*.

Certainly, the Orphic-Platonic dualism, Christian ascetism, in the extreme forms obsessed with “the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh”<sup>184</sup>, the suppression of body and senses – all that may have very particular and *actual* reasons representing a response to real dangers. But the fact that the reasons are real does not, in and by itself, justify the reaction. We do not intend to resolve here the opposition between ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’ but notice that its association with the opposition between ‘God’ and ‘matter’ is of a very dubious value. So far, we have not registered any opposition of the latter kind. ‘God’ and ‘matter’, in so far as their ontological characteristics are concerned, seem to be indistinguishable – they both function as symbols of one and the same.

Viewing the *indistinct* as the place of birth and the ultimate origin, that is, identifying the negativity of ‘matter’ and ‘God’, we are, perhaps, maintaining a heresy. Pantheism always threatens the back-rooms of neo-Platonism and its associate – negativity of the absolute.<sup>185</sup> We do not, however, propose any pantheism. Neither do we *identify* ‘God’ with ‘matter’: the latter simply has no significant meaning and there is only one *indistinct* which is not identified with anything. Thinking of it in any specific way is already a mistaken projection and identification of God and matter is a resulting antinomy. For the time being we will take the risk of offending some theological sensibilities and put the issue to rest. It will return again in Book III, while more detailed remarks on pantheism will be made in 6.3.3.ii.

\* \* \*

126. Reflection is driven by a hunger, it searches. For the truth? For a totality? For God? For its own eradication? To begin with, it does not know. Goals remain hidden until they are reached.

It might seem that reflective thinking is doomed for dwelling in its antinomies. On the one hand, to leave *subjectivity*, to entirely forget *objects* – in order to traverse the *distance* separating the two and achieve an ecstatic union – is impossible. Drugs pacify only for a moment. *Reflection* will always be aware of this table, of that tree, of any *object* as distinct from itself. One can not get dissolved in an ecstatic unity of the *indistinct* and still be oneself. Such a dissolution, abolishing the separated terms, amounts to impossibility not only of thinking and feeling, but of any form of relation whatsoever. In short, it amounts to a new form – perhaps universalised, perhaps depersonalised, but still only a form of – solipsism or, in more pathological cases, of escapism. It helps little to pronounce ‘the end of the subject’, ‘the end of discursive thinking’, the end of whatever one feels does not suffice, hoping that thus one will reach the ‘otherness’. Otherness,

III:8]. One should only be very wary of concluding from such metaphors total depreciation of body and senses. For Plotinus, body is close to matter, but only the latter and not the former, is the cause of evil. For “if body is the cause of Evil, then there is no escape; the cause of Evil is Matter.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. I:1.8] Maimonides does preach restraint and warns against sensuous pleasures, but he also treats body with outermost respect, as witnessed if not by particular texts so by his life-long occupation with medicine. (S. Pessin, *Matter, metaphor, and privative pointing...*, proposes to view the indispensability of the material particulars and their epistemic role in establishing a contact with the active Intellect, as a positive counter-balance to rather harsh and ascetic treatment of the moral and soteriological aspect of body in the *Guide*.)]

<sup>184</sup>after Gal. V:17

<sup>185</sup>Usually not because it is there, but because it can be read there. Theological reservations against aspects of Pseudo-Dionysius (in the times before the first serious doubts concerning his claimed identity as the convert of St. Paul from Acts XVII:34, Dionysius the Areopagite, were raised by Laurentius Valla in the XV-th century.) concerned the sense of creationism and possible pantheism. It seems (as far as we know from few remarks and the records of condemnation of now lost texts) that David of Dinant identified God, Demiurge (intellect) and matter “by arguing logically on the ‘God non-being’ of Denis and Eriugena. God is non-being, matter is non-being, therefore God is matter or matter is God.” [E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*.... VI:1;p.242] The identification was called by Bett “a reckless development of Eriugena’s doctrine” [H. Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena*. [after D. Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*.]] and, indeed, it seems that condemnation (of *Periphyseon* in 1210 and 1225) was based not so much on a thorough consideration of the text as on the mere possibility of extracting from it elements of pantheism. Statements in *Periphyseon* II:546B/545C which might suggest pantheistic reading, are pronounced by the *Alumnus*, are discussed earlier in part I, and are refuted almost immediately by *Nutritor*. In general, Eriugena is rather clear on the double aspect of divinity. “[...] God is both beyond all things and in all things [...] and while He is whole in all things He does not cease to be whole beyond all things, whole in the world, whole around the world [...]” [J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. IV:759a-b] “‘And so God is all things and all things are God.’ Such a judgment will be regarded as monstrous [...]” [J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. III;p.162] The favourite phrase concerning God as well as any substance, that “we can only know *that* it is, but not what it is”, fits well precisely to the *indistinct* as such, whether transcendent God or inaccessible ‘matter’. Pantheism was read also into the texts of the Chartres school, though the accusations can be met plausibly as was done, for instance, in E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*... IV:3.2. footnote 78.

like any relation, presupposes *distance*. To exist means to be confronted with the *non-actuality* of experience, with *chaos* and the *indistinct*; in the most *actual* form, this confrontation is expressed as the *reflective distance* to the *external object*.

On the other hand, the projects of reflective reconstruction or conquest are, as it seems, doomed to failure. Perfect *mimesis* (whether in the artistic form of ancient sculpture or academic painting, or else as the scientific fantasies of doctor Frankenstein, AI, robotics or genome research) appears, indeed, as one of the strongest driving impulses. It is, however, only an expression of the *reflective thirst* for the coincidence with – by the re-creation of – the original truth. This original, however, vastly *transcends* the perspectives of *objectivistic illusion* and its possibilities. Consequently, neither any absolute conquest is to be expected. For such a conquest requires reduction of whatever *transcends* the *actuality* of *reflective acts* to the *signs* which, nevertheless, can be grasped within the *horizon of actuality*. In short, it requires reduction and, as the higher levels are not accessible in terms of lower *distinctions*, the reduction can never happen to be complete. Collecting the building-pieces and putting stone next to stone never finishes. And “[t]he stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”<sup>186</sup>

The suggestions of dissolution, just like the search for *objectivity*, reflect the *thirst*, the search for intimacy with reality. In either form, such reflective projects aim at abolishing the *distance* between the *actual* and *non-actual* which, eventually is the *distance* constituting the very reflective being. Abolishing it, even if it were possible, could not satisfy *reflection* leaving it alone in a solipsistic universe.

Being a *subject* of reflective thinking, one is also much more than that. *Reflection*, one’s *subjectivity*, is not doomed to suffer for the reason of involvement in *actuality* which, after all, is its constitutive feature. *Externalisation* is not the same as alienation in the middle of an estranged world. It becomes so only under the spell of the *objectivistic illusion* which absolutises the *actual dissociations*, in particular, of *subject* and *object*.<sup>127</sup>

Concrete *reflection* is still *reflection*, it still operates with *actual distinctions*. But there is a big difference, even if no sharp border, between the two modes of *reflection*. One retains the *signs* trying to hold on to its *objects*, attempting to conquer time and stop the flow by the spells of its *objectivistic illusion*. The other trades control for enjoyment and, merely noticing, allows things merge back into their element. It does not absolutise the *actuality* of its *signs*, it does not create an *idol* from its way of thinking, from the *externality* of its *objects* and the associated *precision* of the most rigid *distinctions*. Admitting its situation, it admits only its own nature; instead of the impossible attempts to abolish the *distance*, it simply acknowledges it. Only *distance* makes a relation, and hence community, possible. And to keep the *distance*, one has to be oneself, one has to respect oneself, also in the midst of one’s openness, receptivity and new encounters. Although reflecting person is aware of something more than the *actual object*, *reflection*’s ability does not extend beyond it. It does not even extend beyond the *sign* under which the *object*, or whatever else might be, appears. The surrounding *invisibility* can be made present through the *signs*, but never enslaved. Admission that its only power is over the *signs*, its *actual objects*, won’t make *reflection* impotent. On the contrary, like all true humbleness, it makes stronger, that is, more real. Goals remain hidden until they are reached – “What seems at first a cup of sorrow is found in the end immortal wine.”<sup>187</sup>

#### 5.2.4. Two modes of ‘givenness’

We have made occasional references to ‘empiricism’. Let us explain briefly the intention behind such references. By “empiricism” we mean, generally and rather indiscriminately, application of the principle that “all things that exist are only particulars”<sup>188</sup>, that

whatever can be distinguished *is* distinct; eventually, there are only mutually distinct, but inherently indivisible and simple ‘atoms’.

---

<sup>186</sup>Ps. CXVIII:22

<sup>187</sup>The Bhagavad-Gita. XVIII:38

<sup>188</sup>J. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. IV:3.6

Obviously, this comprises much more than what is traditionally called “empiricism”.<sup>189</sup> In fact, “realism” might be almost equally good label, in so far as it expresses the conviction about the real – independent – existence of particular things. Of course, only *in so far*, and not in the sense it obtained during the discussions about the universals. As witnessed for instance by the example of Ockham, “nominalism” may also fall under this heading as it insists on the exclusive reality of dissociated individuals, for which “atomism” might be an alternative name. The tendency culminates perhaps in “phenomenalism” with its epistemologically motivated attempts to find the irrefutable certainty in the ultimate immediacy of the simple data. We may occasionally use such other labels, but in every case it is the above principle which underlies the more specific meanings of various names.

From our perspective it seems namely natural to distinguish this general tendency from another one which, for the time being and in the lack of a better term, we will call “idealistic”. It recognises that “what in empirical science are called *data*, being in a real sense *arbitrarily* chosen by the nature of the hypothesis already formed, could more honestly be called *capta*. By reverse analogy, the fact of [for instance] mathematical science, appearing at first to be arbitrarily chosen, and thus *capta*, are not really arbitrary at all, but absolutely determined by the nature and coherence of our being.”<sup>190</sup> Roughly, this opposite thesis would be:

whatever can be unified *is* one; the highest unity is reflected in the laws, structures and organisation of the manifold of differentiated contents of experience.

Both theses are stated in an exaggerated form and probably no philosophy has ever been built exclusively around any single one of them. Often, they might be present within one and the same system of thought. Also, they can appear in more ontological or more epistemological variants (the latter would go in the direction of replacing the “*is*” with “*is to be considered*”). We certainly do not intend to play the rough terms of such a crude opposition against each other – the actual question for any representative of any one of them is how far the application of the principle can be pushed and where it must stop. They only try to capture some general tendencies which can be discerned either in the totality of a particular system, or else in some of its aspects. The empirical tendency is to look for the ultimate atoms (whether in nature or in experience) and build everything in a bottom-up manner from these. (This comes close to our *reflection*.) The idealistic tendency is to view experience as perhaps differentiated, yet in itself hardly organised matter which receives structure only, or primarily, through the higher laws, as if in a top-down process of confrontation of the unifying forces (whether of mind or nature) with the lower manifold.

Materialism and idealism can often represent the (ontological) extremes of, respectively, empirical and idealistic tendency. Matter has to be seen as discrete in order to provide an empiricist with the building blocks for higher structures. For an idealist, on the other hand, it may easily become an undifferentiated *materia confusa* which obtains a structure only from the constitutive laws of spiritual or transcendental character. (Recall figure §108.(iii) – its dual could represent materialism.)

129. Both tendencies share one basic assumption, namely, that the lowest data of experience are, in fact, differentiated. This originates from the conviction that at the bottom of everything are *immediate* sensations and that experience is eventually what is or can be sensed, i.e., from the Aristotelian

---

<sup>189</sup>“Berkeley’s nominalism, Hume’s statement that whatever things we distinguish are as ‘loose and separate’ as if they had ‘no manner of connection’. James Mill’s denial that similars have anything ‘really’ in common, the resolution of the causal tie into habitual sequence, John Mill’s account of both physical things and selves as composed of discontinuous possibilities, and the general pulverisation of Experience by association and the mind-dust theory, are examples of what I mean.” [W. James, *A World of Pure Experience*. I] But also the radical empiricism’s statement that it “must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced” [Ibid. ] qualifies – by narrowing the focus to the *actuality* of direct experience – for inclusion under our heading of empiricism.

Other examples abound, as do possible distinctions. In the ‘Suspected Man’ passage, Avicenna says something like “If it is possible to conceive *x* without *y*, then *x* and *y* are *really distinct*; each has its own being independently from another.” We do not discuss whether “conceiving *x* without *y*” means conceiving consistently, admitting only logical or also real possibility, merely ‘conceiving without’ or, perhaps, ‘conceiving *x* without *conceiving y*’, etc. – we only register the tendency. Arguing against Scotus’ formal distinction between an individual nature and its individuating difference, *haecceitas*, Ockham contends: “If, therefore, some kind of distinction exists between this nature and this difference, it is necessary that they be really distinct things.” [W. Ockham, *Summa totius logicae*. I:c.xvi]

<sup>190</sup>G. Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*. Introduction;p.xxvii

principle that nothing obtains in the intellect unless it was prior given to the senses. Empiricism models this as some basic ideas, impressions, perceptions or other atoms assumed *given* in *actual experiences*. But to access and manipulate it, one has to postulate more than mere sensations. In fact, it seems that the ultimate atoms of sensations are needed only in order to specify mental structures which enable one – subject – their arrangement and control. Rationalism takes over roughly at this point, postulating some ‘mental’ atoms, clear cognitions or precise intuitions which, at a closer look, also come from experience, though not (exclusively) from sensations or perceptions. On the other hand, it will almost always speak about ‘substances’, some unitary, even if complex entities, which empiricism attempts to dissolve in, and then reconstruct from, the flux of its atoms. Thus in either case, the ‘givens’, ideally of purely sensuous but typically also of some mental character, are there as the starting points – the starting points for philosophical reflection and, as it always turns out, for whatever this *reflection* is trying to describe. In particular, the ‘givens’ have thoroughly *actual* character tending towards pure *immediacy*.

This assumption of ‘givens’ has deeper roots. It results from the posited difference between two primary poles: higher and lower, unified and dispersed, organised and chaotic, one and many. Or, in more familiar terms: subject and object, mind and body, spirit and matter. It is this initial dualism which requires some differentiated or even structured ‘givens’ in order to allow the two *dissociated* poles meet again. As we have seen, when pushed to the metaphysical limits, both dissolve in the homogeneity of indistinctness.

The problems with specifying the ‘ultimate givens’ make us attempt to speak in a way relatively independent of what, possibly, might be considered to be such ‘ultimate atoms’. This Book has thus described the process which, starting with the *absolute indistinct*, leads to the very appearance of ‘givens’ in the sphere of *actual experiences*. The fact that *reflection* and its ‘given’, *dissociated* contents are only result of this process, will not make us imply that they are in any sense ‘unreal’, dispensable or arbitrary. Appearing for *reflection* does not mean to be constituted, not to mention, created *by* it. ‘Givens’ are given exactly because they are discovered and not constructed. Only that this discovery, even when true, is not *absolute*. It is relative to the discovering *existence* as well as to the discovered contents.

## 6 In a few long words...

“*The waking have one common world, but the sleeping turn aside each into a world of his own.*” Heraclitus, DK  
22B89

This section was supposed to summarise the development in the current Book. However, it has expanded beyond the limits of a reasonable summary. So, probably, it is a bit more than that...

### 6.1 Separation

*Birth* is *separation* from the *origin*, from the *indistinct nothingness*. It is the fundamental, in fact, the only ontological event, the first hypostasis. *Separation* is not alienation, it does not establish a being which is now exiled and doomed to loneliness. On the contrary, only *separation* makes it possible for a being not to be alone. Only by being *separated* can a being be confronted with something else, something it is not. “To be united is divine and good; so whence this obsession//Among people, that only one and oneness should exist?”<sup>191</sup> The original *separation* establishes the ultimate *transcendence confronting the separated being*, and *existence* is this very *confrontation*.

In fact, *separation* is a generic concept comprising the structural similarities discernible in all subsequent hypostases – the second one from the *originally separated existence* to the *distinctions* of the limitless *chaos*, the third one from *chaos* to the recognisable world of *experience*, and finally, from *experience* to the *objectified world of reflective experiences*.

At each level, *separation* happens against the background of the previous level, and it happens through the emergence of more *actualised aspects* distinguished from the *nexus* of the preceding level. The emerging *actuality* is now confronted with the background from which it emerged and which recedes into *non-actuality* and, on the other hand, with the non-*actuality* of ‘the rest’ of

<sup>191</sup>F. Hölderlin, *The Source of All Evil*.

the things distinguished at the same level. This event establishes a new level; the background withdraws giving place to a new differentiation which will become the background for the next stage.

Separation creates a distance which is manifested through signs (except for the very first stages, where it is a mere signification). Sign points primarily to the background from which it has been extracted, and secondarily to the signified distinction, eventually, to the external object. A sign has thus always this twofold direction of pointing towards something and also towards the background of this something. In the Heideggerian language we could say that it reveals as much as it ‘hides’, it brings forth the actual and, by this very fact, it ‘veils’ the non-actual background of this actuality. Sign relates not only to the signified but is also the means through which the separated being recognises the limits of its actuality and thus confronts the non-actual surrounding it.

132. Transcendence is what exceeds actuality, and signs are the means by which the latter is confronted with the former. Signs are given tokens, terminal points of traces stretching, eventually, from the transcendent origin to the midst of here-and-now. Although signs are purely actual, dissociated ..., their traces carry nevertheless the non-actual aspects which thus remain present around the horizon of actuality. Non-actual does not exclude presence, and so transcendence does not mean any absolute isolation of the poles which one might attempt to overcome on the way towards some coincidence. It means the distance which, separating the poles, is a necessary condition of any relation between them. As Merleau-Ponty says, both search for ultimate, exact essences and attempts to achieve coincidence (of subject and object) are failed, in fact, misunderstood ways of accounting either for experience or even for the philosophical project. For “every being appears in a distance, which is not an obstacle for acquaintance [*Erkenntnis*], but on the contrary – makes it possible. [...] Independently whether one claims infinite distance or absolute proximity, negation or coincidence – our reference to Being remains equally unrecognised. [...] One forgets that this frontal being before us, whether constituted by us or constituting itself in us as being constituted, is in principle secondary, is cut against a horizon which is not any nothing and which is not itself through any co-constitution.”<sup>192</sup>

Primarily, this distance, the constant and only implicit ‘reference to Being’, is the vertical, qualitative transcendence of the background. Differentiation makes the background withdraw but not disappear; it acquires a new character of differentiated, and ideal, totality. Trying to account for the background from a lower, eventually, reflective level, one naturally projects into it the character of the actual objects. This gives rise to another form of transcendence, the horizontal, quantitative transcendence of the signified – a mere more of objects which are not here-and-now but there-and-then, ‘outside actuality’. At the level of reflective experience, this was identified as objectivistic illusion.

133. Separation is not a simple, mechanic dissociation; creating distance it confronts, and thus is also self-awareness. To be confronted means to encounter transcendence. Encountering something distinct is, analytically, inseparable from encountering oneself: confronting the transcendence of ‘...’ means the awareness of ‘...’ being distinct from oneself, *eo ipso*, the awareness of oneself being distinct from ‘...’.

This structure is present from the very beginning, from birth; the only aspect varying from one level to another is the degree of its sharpness. The primordial ontological event, separating a being from the nothingness, is the ultimate site of individuality, *haecceitas*. Distinction confronts this being with the chaos of distinctions – the individuality acquires (self-)awareness of own finitude. Recognition confronts actuality with experience – self-awareness becomes a more confident feeling of predictability, of being at home in the world and, at the same time, of not being the world. Finally, reflection confronts one with its object, with an experience in which self-awareness finds the possibility of dissociated acts of self-reflection which, focusing on the internal, subjective aspect, reach towards the external objects.

This is the general structure of separation and, in fact, the totality of the concept of experience. As we have seen, the successive stages bring about a gradual refinement of the distinguished contents and of the character of actuality. The further we proceed, the more definite become the objects and the more involved into spatio-temporality. This involvement is only a side-effect of

---

<sup>192</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. Inquiry and intuition; p.133.

the fact that also spatio-temporal aspects became *distinguished*. As the *distinguished* contents acquire sharper boundaries leaving more and more layers of *non-actuality* behind, the *actuality* itself becomes more clearly *dissociated* and, by the same token, confronted with *externalised objects*. At the level of *reflective experience*, this results in discovering the *objective order* of the world organised along the complementary dimensions of the *objective time and space*.

The confrontation with *transcendence*, the uniqueness of the event of *birth* and, consequently, of the whole experience, is what constitutes *unity* – not *totality* – of existence. It is individuality irreducible to any ‘this’ or ‘that’, ‘why’ and ‘how’. It is individuality established by the primordial ontological event, by the first hypostasis; individuality which, in the face of the unique world, stretches beyond its horizon, as well as beyond the horizon of time and temporality. What makes up this singularity, *haecceitas* is “neither matter nor form nor the composite thing [...] but it is the *ultimate reality of the being*.<sup>193</sup> We will eventually return to this aspect, in II:2 and in III.

## 6.2 One – not Many

*Chaos* is a pure manifold, where “pureness” denotes the lack of any internal relationships, the mere heterogeneity of *distinctions*. One might claim that it is easier to imagine than the *nothingness* of the *one*. Why do we start with the *one* then? Why not start, as many would, from pure manifold? Why Parmenides and not Heraclitus, perhaps, Plato rather than Aristotle, Spinoza rather than Descartes, monotheism and not polytheism, idealism and not realism?

For the first, *positing* chaos of differences is an act of exactly the same kind as *positing* the *one*.<sup>134</sup> It is neither easier nor harder, it is neither closer to experience nor further from it. It is an act of *positing* – in one case, of the *unity*, in the other of the *totality* reaching beyond the experience. If we accept *indistinctness* of the *one* as the *origin of distinctions*, then there is hardly even a possibility left for claiming any primordial plurality – any plurality requires a *distinction*, and any *distinction* involves plurality, “for all distinct things are two or more, but all indistinct things are one.”<sup>194</sup> ‘Two *indistincts*’ is an impossibility, and we do not even need Ockham’s razor to complete the traditional proof of the uniqueness of the first beginning.

On the other hand, “[a]ll multitude participates in a certain respect of The One. For if it in no respects participates of The One, neither will the whole be *one* whole, nor each of the many of which the multitude consists; but there will also be a certain multitude arising from each of these, and this will be the case to infinity. [...] All multitude is posterior to The One.”<sup>195</sup>

One can not *posit* pluralism without *positing* a pluralistic *universe*. Examples might be multiplied *ad infinitum* so let us quote only a few. *Positing* a chaos of differences one is forced, sooner or later, to perform the common trick – start talking *as if* it were one. “*The collection of all effects* is itself an effect; hence it is an effect of a cause which in no way is an element of this collection...”<sup>196</sup> Or else ‘Eternal Return is the being of *this world*, the only The Same which can be predicated about *this world*, excluding from it any prior sameness.’<sup>197</sup> James’ radical empiricism, with its generous pluralism, starts with something like: “Nothing shall be admitted as fact, except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient;”<sup>198</sup> But very shortly after we read: “though one part of our experience may lean upon another part to make it what it is in any one of several aspects in which it may be considered, *experience as a whole* is self-containing and leans

<sup>193</sup>J. Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*. II:d3.q6

<sup>194</sup>Eckhart, *Commentary on the Book of Wisdom*. (Ws. VII:27a) [after B. McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart...* p.167] Indistinctness appears as the univocal concept of Being already with J. Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* I:3.1.2.44,57; II:1.4-5.15 [after R. Heinzmann, ed., *The Medieval Philosophy*. p.232]

<sup>195</sup>Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §1/§5 [my emph.]; also §69. “But there must be a unity underlying the aggregate: a manifold is impossible without a unity for its source or ground, or at least, failing some unity, related or unrelated. This unity must be numbered as first before all and can be apprehended only as solitary and self-existent.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:6.3, also VI:6.11.] In a phenomenological version: “Every genuine irreducible «sphere» of being is an eidetic unity which is *given* as a «background» *before* positing reality [*«Realsetzung»*] of any entity which is possible within it and, consequently, it does not form a mere sum of all accidental facts.” [M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*. C:II]

<sup>196</sup>J. Duns Scotus, *A Treatise on God as First Principle*. 3.13 [my emph.]; Aquinas, with his insistence on the difference between the events and mechanisms acting ‘within the world’ and acts of God addressing ‘the totality of the world’, might be quoted extensively here, too.]

<sup>197</sup>G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. p.338. [my emph.] This Eternal Return is, perhaps, not exactly the same but still very similar to our *chaos*.

<sup>198</sup>W. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. VI;p.160

on nothing.”<sup>199</sup> At what ‘definite time’ is this ‘experience as a whole’ experienced? OK, let us admit that there may be special *actual experiences*, as rare as they are important, which seem to address the whole – of our life, of our world, of the world. But is ‘all my life’ experienced only at some ‘definite times’? Is it not also experienced all the time, as if, underneath the particulars which furnish and exhaust the contents of *actual experiences*? If it is only a matter of particular *actual experiences* then what makes just these ones so special, so much more important than all the other *actual experiences*? It seems, it must be their content, not mere *actuality*. It seems that they address something special, very special, something which is in fact the aspect along which and around which all the *actual experiences* are structured. Any experience is only a part, an aspect of one’s life. But a pluralist has always tremendous problem with accounting for the fact that not all experiences are of the same order, not all are pieces of equal value. He, too, is bound to end up with some kind of structure, some ‘totality of all causes’, some ‘Eternal Return as the only The Same’, or what not, which either is posited implicitly and sneaks in through the back-door, or else leans towards mere associationism (what else could it be in a universe of essentially equivalent pieces?). Or he may turn a bit more rationalist and start discerning some structure in the experience itself, but then he is already on the way out of *chaos...*

“Since the acquisition of conscious quality on the part of an experience depends upon a context coming to it, it follows that the *sum total* of all experiences, having no context, can not strictly be called conscious at all. It is a ‘that’, an Absolute, a ‘pure’ experience on an enormous scale, undifferentiated and undifferentiable into thought and thing.”<sup>200</sup> James, though methodologically biased by his pragmatism and empiricism, remains nevertheless always honest and acute in his descriptions. It is not the lack of intuition but the ghost of a ‘pluralistic’ universe of ‘experiences’ which – confronted with the emptiness, unconsciousness and apparent pragmatical irrelevance of such a ‘totality’ – deters James from deeper consideration, allowing him to confuse it with the ‘Absolute’ and to rest satisfied with a mere phenomenological description of religious experiences.

135. In short, considering the chaos of differences, the plurality of distinctions as primordial, one still has to turn it into a ‘one’, even if one resists making it *one*. Speaking about ‘pure manifold’ one is already speaking about the *one*, one *posits* the totality of *distinctions* as something one wants to speak about – “for you cannot conceive the many without the one.”<sup>201</sup> But this is merely a necessity of speaking, one might say. Yes it is, but it is also what we are doing – speaking.

If one denies the *unity*, and claims merely the ‘totality of all differences’, then what makes one so inclined to turn it into a ‘totality’? Is it only because the listeners demand something like that? It may be just the way we speak and use our language, but such ‘therapeutic’ gestures have hardly any serious appeal. Totality simply can not be thought without a unity, the idea of unity is a priori condition for the idea of totality. One might nevertheless insist that this concerns only the order of ideas and thinking, but that ‘out there’, ‘in reality’, things are actually other way around, scattered and independent from each other, without any unity except of being placed in ... well, not *one* world, but just scattered around. To such empirically oriented and grounded suggestions there is one main question: what *multiplicity*? Why not *multiplicites*?

136. We think that, no matter how paralogical and antinomous, the idea, the need to comprehend *all* things in form of some *unity* (and not merely a *totality*) is more than a mere illusion. It is a reflection of the *unity* of existence, not only of reason and *actual apperception*, but of the individual existence whose *unity* is established by the primordial *separation* from the *origin*. It is much more than a mere application of *reflective thinking* in terms of *dissociated objects* to the *totality* of everything. Such an application is merely a source of antinomies and impossible questions. However, the *one* is not a ‘one’, is not an *object*, and *reflection positing* it as such for the purpose of discourse must remember that. It is not an *object* whose identity has to be established and whose differentiation needs a proof. It is the *indistinct*, that beyond which no *distinction* is possible, because everything *distinguished* enters by this very token the world of *distinctions* leaving the *indistinct* behind. As the limit of all *distinctions*, the indistinguishability-as-such, it is the very essence of *unity* and identity. As the *origin* of both identity and differences, it comes before them and hence cannot be explained in their terms – either we start with it, or

---

<sup>199</sup>Ibid. VII:1;p.193 [my emph.]

<sup>200</sup>Ibid. IV:4;p.134

<sup>201</sup>Plato, *Parmenides*.

else we will never reach it.

The fact that we can not think *chaos* without thinking it as one *chaos*, might be an argument, 137. but it would be *only* an argument, an attempt to reduce something *invisible* to the plain, all too plain, categories of *reflection*.<sup>202</sup> It is not one which is opposed to many and it does not contain multiplicity *within* itself. It is not a Maximum, not any *plus quam ... , ens realissimum, omnitudo realitatis* – as Heidegger would repeat after negative theologians and Scholastics, it is Being, not *a* being. It is a pure *virtuality*, like a single cell is a virtuality of a living being, like (according to some theories) a single  $\gamma$ -ray is a virtuality of the whole universe. It contains everything that follows – not *actually*, however, not potentially (which is but a form of *actuality*), not ‘within itself’, but only *virtually*, as the *nothingness* of a true beginning contains all that follows, as the indispensable condition contains everything it makes possible.

An empirical pluralist, a lover of manifold, is afraid that *one* would take from him the glorious variety of *actual* multiplicity. The liveless monotony of a de-concretised ‘one’, just like that of an over-rationalised universe of rules and laws is certainly something nobody wishes. But *one*, being the *virtual origin* of manifold, does not negate it, does not oppose it, does not abolish it – it only remains *invisibly present above* it. In fact, as a pure *virtuality*, it becomes *present* only through *chaos*, only through differentiation. It only stays beyond and *above* it.

### 6.3 To be is to be distinguished

*Birth*, the original separation is *the only* ontological event. But do not later *distinctions* have 138. any ontological significance? Certainly they do: to be is to be *distinguished*, that is, to make a difference.<sup>203</sup> This is the ground on which the general association of ‘being’ and ‘independence’ rests. Independence, as being *distinguished*, is not a property of something that is – it is what makes it be. This association can be, and was, pressed to the ultimate limits by claiming that only particulars ‘are’ – particulars, that is, the most definitely *distinguished* entities, eventually, completely *dissociated* ideal substances, prone to inscription within the ideal limit of the horizon of *immediacy*, in a single point. But being is not only the event of the utmost *actuality*; it begins at the very beginning.

*Distinction* involves two *equipollent aspects*: the fact of *distinguishing* and the *distinguished* content. Distinguishing anything, we focus naturally on the distinguished content but along with it, we also experience the mere fact that we distinguish, *pure distinction*. This contentless and universal fact is the univocal emptiness of the (im)possible concept of ‘being’. The latter, the *distinguished* ‘what’, is the content which can be further refined and underlined, eventually, *actual* determinations. It *finds actual* characterisations of various distinguished things and the conceptual differences between them. These two *aspects*, present and discernible in everything that is, determine the two main lines of considerations on ‘being’.

“‘Being’ is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing.”<sup>204</sup> Indeed, logically, ‘being’ does not seem to be any real predicate – it is conceptually empty, as is, logically, any predicate which can be applied indiscriminately to everything. But, ‘unreal’ as it seems, it has the fundamental function, for there is a big difference between ‘positing’ something as being and ‘positing’ it as not-being. “It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations, as existing in themselves.”<sup>205</sup> This ‘mere positing’, conceptually negligible as it perhaps is, expresses the most fundamental fact, “the first act, the first division,”<sup>206</sup> the primordial recognition of being.

“‘Being’ is something fixed and restful in being(s).”<sup>207</sup> Being (*esse*) is, with Aquinas, something

<sup>202</sup>This might, indeed, trouble many for what proof, or at least an argument, could we offer? None. If one wants proofs, one better study mathematics; while the only value of arguments is that they possibly may help to clarify what one means.

<sup>203</sup>We can claim here some support of etymology which constructs “existence” (not only in our, but also in the general sense of being) from *ex* = ‘out’ and *stare* = ‘stand’, i.e. as ‘standing outside’, ‘being separated’ or ‘exiled’. This may but need not be made different from the interpretation making existence into ‘standing outside itself’, for ‘being separated’ is just ‘having outside’, and ‘standing outside’ means also to ‘to be (through) what one is not’.

<sup>204</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. I:2nd Division.3.4, A598-599/B626-627

<sup>205</sup>Ibid.

<sup>206</sup>Eckhart *Latin Sermons* Ga.III:16-22. [B. McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart... XXIX, God is one*]

<sup>207</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*. I:20.4, «esse est aliquid fixum et quietum in ente»; Gilson p.368

more than the mere thing which is (*quod est*) and its form which makes it what it is (*quo est*). It is a pure divine act, above the duality of essence-existence and form-matter, which endows a ‘what’ with actual existence. (Although conceptual distinction had to be maintained, its proximity to *actus purus*, as Alexander of Hales characterised God, is unmistakable.) It is “the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence existence is that which actuates all things, even their forms. Therefore [...] it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received; but rather as the received to the receiver. When therefore I speak of the existence of man, or horse, or anything else, existence is considered a formal principle, and as something received; and not as that which exists.”<sup>208</sup>

Duns Scotus pointed out that we can grasp that something is without grasping whether it is a substance or an accident, or let’s put it more generally, without grasping what it is. The ultimate Being, conceptually as empty as rich in the existential possibilities of beings, seems to rest at the bottom of all metaphysics, not only according to Scotus. “For all beings participate in Being. Therefore, if participation is removed from all beings, there remains simplest Being itself, which is the essence of all things.”<sup>209</sup> It can be, indeed, very difficult to imagine in what sense this eventual abstraction manages to be the essence of all things, for “when I mentally remove all the things that participate Being, nothing seems to remain.”<sup>210</sup> There seems to remain nothing and yet, it is Being, and so Heidegger still asks: “Was ist das ‘es’ das gibt?”<sup>211</sup> What remains is the ‘first event’, the mere beginning, the *distinction* which breaks the silence of *nothingness*. As an almost plain and visible illustration consider, “for instance, when somebody, approaching from a distance, causes in me a sense-perception with the help of which I can judge only that what I see is an existent. In this case it is clear that my first abstractive cognition (first, that is, in order of origination) is the cognition of existence, and of nothing less general; consequently it is not a specific concept nor a concept proper to a singular thing.” The example illustrates well the intended meaning of *distinction* as ‘the first’, perhaps vague and indefinite, and yet *clear* apprehension of ‘something being there’.<sup>212</sup> This ‘something’ is as yet unclear, its particularity remains still veiled in the barely discerned fact of existence. But its individuality is already fully transparent. And thus, the abstract generality of Being is, in fact, the most specific individuality of particular beings.

140. Quoting Ockham, however, we seem to be moving in a completely opposite direction. Along this first line, following the intuition of the ultimate *that*, Being emerges as a univocal and distinct principle lifted above and transcending all particular beings. But its conceptual emptiness can cause some worries, especially, for the epistemologically oriented (whether nominalism, empiricism or linguisticism), for which it amounts simply to bare emptiness. Indeed, how can we claim any significant difference between being and that which is, between existence and essence? After all, there is only that which is, ‘to be’ is necessarily ‘to be something’: “essence and existence are not two things. On the contrary, the words “thing” and “to be” signify one and the same thing, but the one in the manner of a noun and the other in the manner of a verb [...] there is no more reason to imagine that essence is indifferent in regard to being and non-being, than that it is indifferent in regard to being an essence and not being an essence. For as an essence may exist and may not exist, so an essence may be an essence and may not be an essence.”<sup>213</sup> This identification of *essentia* (and *esse*) with *existentia* is a general tendency of the empirically and also analytically oriented philosophy (the difference being only that the former renounces Being (if not also essences) on the

<sup>208</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q4.a1.ad3

<sup>209</sup>Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I:17.51

<sup>210</sup>Ibid.

<sup>211</sup>“*Es gibt*” is the German ‘There is’, which literally says “It gives”. One can be led by this German phrase towards something ‘that is’ (and gives) easier than by its English equivalent.

<sup>212</sup>W. Ockham, *Quodlibeta* I:q.13. We certainly won’t follow Ockham in his insistence on the merely ‘abstractive’ character of this ‘cognition’, that is one ‘by which it cannot be evidently known whether a contingent fact exists or does not exist’ [W. Ockham, *Ordinatio*. Prologue:q1 ]. The example seems, on the contrary, to indicate that it is ‘intuitive cognition’, i.e., one “that enables us to know whether the thing exists or not” [Ibid. ] This latter ‘cognition’ seemed to require a precise grasp of the ‘individual thing’, and our point is precisely the opposite – the existence of a thing, its *that*, although actually not preceding its ‘what’, is nevertheless logically prior and remains above all more precise determinations of its nature, character, or properties. ‘The cognition of existence’ in the example is, perhaps, very ‘general’ but only in so far as merely cognitive content is concerned. It is, on the other hand, the most specific experience of something particular being there.

<sup>213</sup>W. Ockham, *Summa totius logiae*. III:II.c.xxvii

grounds of atomistic ontology while the latter for its irresolvable involvement into more specific conceptual and linguistic contexts.) “There are as many kinds of existential statements, as there are kinds of the objects of discourse.”<sup>214</sup> Why not follow such a line of thought all the way and say: “There are as many kinds of existential statements, as there are [] objects of discourse.” Now, the kinds seem to disappear and we are left with: “There are as many existential statements, as there are objects of discourse.” A tautology? Not really, for it reflects only the tendency to dissolve Being into atomic existents, once existence ceases to have any *transcendent aspects*, in particular, when Being is reduced to ‘being something’, i.e., existence is reduced to essence and, eventually, to the mere empirical fact of distinctness of *actual things*.<sup>215</sup> An almost equivalent formulation might be: “[b]ecause singularity immediately befits that to which it belongs, therefore it cannot befit it through something else; therefore if something is singular, it is singular by itself.”<sup>216</sup> Of course, assuming only particulars versus their kinds may be the distinction between nominalism and (some form of) conceptualism which does not interest us. In either case, the tendency is the same: as being means being a particular individual, Being has no meaning except, perhaps, as a totally equivocal abbreviation. Yet, no matter how many *kinds* of existential statements one manages to postulate or even identify, they will be all kinds of *existential* statements.

Where does it lead us? For we do not want to follow the (im)possible variations of these two tendencies, where concepts become mere words or else ‘internal’ reflections of essences, *quiddities* disappear or else become only visible reflections of exemplars, the eternal exemplars are divine ideas which, perhaps, are thoughts co-eternal with God’s being or else are only results created by His thinking, etc., etc. The distinctions and ever new intermediary stages which, like in the third-man argument, seem to be required by the initial dualism in order to create an impression that the dissociated poles nevertheless meet. The *dissociation* is, as usual, that of *object* and *subject*, only here it appears under the aspect where the ‘objective’ existence seems a bare *that*, while the ‘subjective’ conception is the actual content, the ‘what’.

The two, apparently contrary tendencies, are elaborations of these two aspects of the unitary event of *distinction*. For ‘to be’ is to be *distinguished*. As soon as you *distinguish* something it is; it *is* even if it remains vague and *unclear* ‘what’ it is. On the other hand, if something remains *undistinguished*, it is not even a ‘something’, it is not even an ‘it’ – there remains *indistinct*, but it is not ‘it’ that remains *indistinct*.<sup>217</sup> “To be” signifies nothing determinable because it merely places whatever is *distinguished* in its *indistinct* origin. The copula lends its subjects the universal privilege of participation in Being, of being *distinguished*. *Distinction* is only secondarily a *dissociation* of *a* from *b*; primarily, it is *distinction* of *x* from the indistinct background, and traces of this aspect mark all *actuality*. The universality of . . . – the concept? the idea? the intuition? – no, of the experience of ‘to be’ is coextensive with the universality of *distinguishing*, that is, with all life. Brought to the level of language, there is, of course, no need for a particular form, a particular verb. As Derrida, quoting Benveniste, observes discussing the transcategoriality of “to be”: “the strangeness is in the facts – that the verb of existence, out of all verbs, has this privilege of being present in an utterance in which it does not appear.”<sup>218</sup> It is there, and it is everywhere, because every word and gesture brings in a *distinctions*, while without *distinctions* there would be no world and, consequently, no words.

The celebrated equivocity of “is”, of “to be”, is only the equivocity of *distinction* – *distinguished* contents may have nothing in common, no common genus, no links of similarity, except for being *distinguished*. The equivocity is the possibly unlimited differentiation of the distinguished contents. In fact, “the difference between the existence of chairs and the existence of numbers seems, on reflection, strikingly like the difference between numbers and chairs. Since you have the

<sup>214</sup>N. Malcolm, *Anselm’s ontological arguments*. III

<sup>215</sup>We are deliberately ignoring here the distinction between the postulated essences and their conceptual, that is, mental counterparts. This issue will be addressed in II:1.2.2, in particular, §§25 ff

<sup>216</sup>W. Ockham, *Ordinatio*. I:d2.q6 §85 [translated by John Kilcullen]

<sup>217</sup>We will not reduce this to a mere ‘formal concept’ (an act of mind or a concept merely representing an object), as opposed to ‘objective concept’ (the represented objects), for this distinction arises only as a consequence of the *dissociation* of ‘subjective object’ (thought or formal concept) from its ‘objective object’ (or objective concept). To be *distinguished* is not to be a formal or other concept, a mere mental accident – it is to *be*.

<sup>218</sup>J. Derrida, *The supplement of Copula*. The Remainder as Supplement... p.202. One can recall here the example of Semitic languages which dispense with the use of ‘to be’ as copula and express it in the nominative sentences (e.g., “Pegasus winged horse.” for “Pegasus is a winged horse.”)

latter to explain the former, you do not also need ‘exist’ to be polysemic.”<sup>219</sup> There is what is distinguished and, beyond that, only the *indistinct*.

### 6.3.1. Relativity and objectivity

142. But wait, is there anything which we do not *distinguish*? Does it mean that *everything* is? Yes, it does. And dreams, and square circles, and Pegasus? OK, we would say “Pegasus is a horse with wings” or something like that. A cheap, grammatical trick would be to point to the “is” in this sentence, but we do not rely fully on mere language usage, let alone, grammar. Of course, that Pegasus *is*. It is in a very different way than the horse out there, but still it is, it is *distinguished*, even much more, it is *distinguished* as something. That it, perhaps, does not have material existence, that it is not a living being, that it is a concept or a mythical figure are truths which do not in the slightest affect the fact that it *is* – we all know ‘what’ it is, so we should not be so concerned whether it, in fact, is. Even “fictions are from God, because some of them are mental entities, some vocal, some written signs, and all of these are real beings and thus are from God, just as lies are from God, since they are real entities.”<sup>220</sup> There is nothing wrong with ‘being’ of a thought – a thought *is* as much as a horse, a table, or a meaningful relationship.

143. But sure, one usually means something more specific with “being”. What?

The dream I had yesterday *is*, the image, the phantom of perfection I am chastising *is*, the illusions I nourish *are*, the feeling I have *is*. It is impossible to get rid of this ascription of ‘being’ in spite of the fact that we would say that all these things *are not*. They are not because they are *only* my subjective feelings, imaginations, ideals... Yet, to be an image, is not that also ‘to be’? That they are all ‘subjective’ does not in the least deprive them of being because they, too, are *distinguished*, even *distinguished* as these specific ‘whats’. They are called “subjective” because they are relative only to me – though, as a matter of fact, now not any longer only to me! One used to say they are only “for me” but this suggests that something might be ‘for nobody’, ‘in itself’ which is exactly what we find completely implausible. Relativity to particular person or group of people is a further differentiation of the *distinguished* beings, of things which *are*.

Surely, one may keep distinguishing different ways of being: something being relative *exclusively* to my act or experience versus something relative also to the experience of others, something relative exclusively to my thought or also to my perception, something relative to human experience in general versus something relative to the corresponding experience of ants, etc. But all such are secondary *distinctions*, in particular, the supposed ‘realities’ they postulate are invariably of a limited scope: the ‘physicalist reality’ is threatened by the ‘reality of subjective qualia’, the ‘reality of perception’ by the ‘reality of feelings’, the ‘reality of my life’ by the ‘reality common to all’, the ‘reality of public consensus’ by the ‘reality of personal convictions’.

One would like to arrive at something which is constant and fixed, one and the same ‘for everybody’. But populism and consensus is no measure of ‘reality’, although it is certainly the measure of the ‘reality about which there is a consensus’. The richness of the possible *distinctions* and relativisations is only the richness of our world. Interesting and sometimes even relevant as such relative distinctions may be, they are not very useful to us. They lead invariably to positing some form of being as ‘*the* being’, ‘*the* real’, and delegating all others to ‘unreality’. For there is only a very small and usually imperceptible transition from the question about the ultimate principle of everything to the exclusion from the reality of everything which does not conform to the ‘discovered’ principle. Yet a principle which would embrace absolutely everything can hardly have any determinate content – principles tend to (if not must) exclude something. Eventually, the search for the ‘true reality’, for something which is both determinate and not relative to our way of *existing*, leads invariably towards the abyss of the inaccessible ‘reality’ of ‘things in themselves’, and dissolution of everything we know and experience in the merely phenomenal ‘unreality’.

‘Reality’ (and it is very tempting to credit the Greek philosophers with its invention, even though they had no word for it), when opposed to anything, in particular to the mind as something mind-independent, becomes but a metaphysical extension of the *actual dissociation of subject and object*. And then, immediately, follows the search for the infallible, ‘real’ criteria of ‘reality’. The

---

<sup>219</sup>J. A. Fodor, *Concepts*. III:p.54

<sup>220</sup>W. Ockham, *Quodlibeta*. III:q.3 (As is often the case, we do not have to subscribe to the details of the argument.)

Greek ‘fall’ from the reality of myths to the ‘true reality’ of *objectivism*, praised as much as it always has been for laying down the foundations of science and rationality, was primarily drawing the *distinction*, in fact, *dissociating* the ‘real’ from the ‘unreal’. But there is nothing unreal. How could there be? It takes a lot of disappointment to rise suspicion, and then a lot of suspicion to claim that reality consists of two parts: ‘real’ and ‘unreal’.

Everything *is*, or else there is no thing, there is nothing, which is not, about which one could not – in one or another, but always meaningful way – say that it is. “It is and it is not so, that it is not.”<sup>221</sup> Once you start pointing at something, you *distinguish* it and hence – it *is*. “Being itself is manifold within itself, and whatever else you may name has Being.”<sup>222</sup> Everything is and this seems like another side of the fact that it is so hard to say something which could not possibly make any sense. The equivocity of “to be” is the equivocity of all the differences which we can *distinguish*; its univocity is the universality and univocity of the fact of *distinguishing*.

### 6.3.2. A note on Berkeley’s idealism

We won’t let grammar mislead us, grammar pointing out that saying “to be distinguished”, we 144. already use the word “be”. It is only grammar, besides only English or German grammar.<sup>223</sup> Thus, while to exist is to *distinguish*, *existere est distinguere*, so instead of Berkeley’s *esse est percipi* (which arises from the same intuition), we would say *esse est distingui*. We should probably comment briefly on the relation to Berkeleyan idealism. For are we not actually reducing ontology to epistemology, being to being perceived? No, we are not.

First, there is a difference between our *distinction* and perception. The latter is the category of *actuality*, and Berkeleyan idealism suffers from phenomenism and nominalism for this reason. Restricting being to being perceived, he reduces being to pure *actuality* and everything (not only so vehemently criticised abstract ideas) transcending this horizon becomes ... ‘unreal’.

Furthermore, the *actuality* involves one into the dualism of *subject-object*, so naturally conflated with that of ‘mind’-‘matter’. Berkeley gets rid of the latter but the dualism remains effective, both in argumentation and, as we believe, in his thinking. “Ideas imprinted on the sense are real things, or do really exist; this we do not deny, but we deny they can subsist without the minds which perceive them, or that they are resemblances of any archetypes existing without the mind.”<sup>224</sup> One could perhaps invent a distinction between ‘real’ and ‘subsisting’ allowing one to accept the former and deny the latter. As it happens, Berkeley can accept the real, continuous existence of things subsisting without our minds, only because they subsist in God’s mind. This is again the disturbance caused by the mere *actual* perception. For us, a table left unperceived in a room keeps existing undisturbed, because we all go around with the understanding that it is there – it is *distinguished* also when it is not *actually* perceived by anybody.

This, of course, still involves the relativity to the *distinguishing* existence. But here we are touching upon the main difference – existence of things ‘in the mind’. “Thing or Being is the most general name of all: it comprehends under it two kinds entirely distinct and heterogenous, and which have nothing common but the name, viz. spirits and ideas. The former are active, indivisible substances; the latter are inert, fleeting, dependent beings, which subsist not by themselves, but are supported by, or exist in minds or spiritual substances.”<sup>225</sup> Just like the previous quote, we could accept this one almost without any changes, except for a minor detail which turns out to be the crucial difference: beings which “are supported by, or exist in minds of spiritual substances”. The vocabulary of “being supported by” and “substances” should be taken very seriously here, for the point is that things exist as if they were mere accidents of spiritual substances. This is much

<sup>221</sup> Parmenides DK 28B2. Parmenides seems to have been exceptional among the Greeks in resisting the temptation to disgrace some forms of Being as ‘unreal’ – “un-Greek as no other in the two centuries of the Tragic Age.” [F. Nietzsche, *Nietzsche on Parmenides*. «ungriechisch wie kein anderer in den zwei Jahrhunderten des tragischen Zeitalters】

<sup>222</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:3.13

<sup>223</sup> In Scandinavian languages, for instance, the passive form does not require the usage of “to be”. In Norwegian “Å være betyr å skilles” says, literally, “To be means (to be) distinguished”, where the parenthesised (to be) simply does not occur and where the apparently active “skilles”, “to distinguish itself”, has a marvelous ambiguity involving equally the passive aspect of “(being) distinguished” (as in “ting skilles ...” which is as much “things are distinguished...” as “things distinguish themselves...”).

<sup>224</sup> G. Berkeley, *A Treatise....* §90

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. §89

more than our claim of relativity to existence. Things are *distinguished by* existence (or mind, to keep it closer to Berkeley's vocabulary, though not his concepts), but the *distinctions* are made *in* the *indistinct*. I do not draw *distinctions in* my mind while you *in yours*, we all draw them in the one and the same *indistinct*. We may draw them differently, but this is another point.

For things which exist only 'in the minds' to be 'objective', some universal and 'objective mind' (typically and, for a bishop, quite naturally God's mind) is indeed needed.<sup>226</sup> But this is not so for things which are only discovered by, and hence only relative to, the mind. Not only 'being relative' does not contradict 'being objective' but belongs – even, belongs essentially – to the latter. One can not specify anything claiming its objective existence without having first *distinguished* it. And *distinctions* are relative. What concrete things appear (are *distinguished*) depends on the organism and we certainly live in very different worlds than ants do. But the fact that a thing appears for an ant and not for us does not make it less 'objective' or 'real' – at most, only less relevant for us. This relativity does not deprive the appearances of any 'reality' or 'objectivity'. Existing 'in the minds' (whatever that might mean) involves dependence on these minds. But relativity to an *existence* does not require (nor imply) dependence on this *existence*. A daltonist and I can see the same object as having different colours – our perceptions of it are relative (to our minds, including organs of perception). But they are not dependent on, in the sense of being caused or otherwise determined by, our minds.<sup>227</sup> *Existence* does not generate *distinctions*, it encounters them, meets them in the *indistinct* – this is the sense of *confrontation* in the sphere of the *distinguished*. Consequently, what is being *distinguished* are not mere appearances but the very things which *are*. This does not, of course, mean that all *distinctions* are equally adequate, or that no mistakes are possible, but truth and adequacy are just categories of relating some (set of) *distinctions* to another, and we will take it up at some later time (II:2.2.3.ii). Things are *distinguished from* the background which remains their *origin*. *Distinctions* do not turn them into mere 'appearances', in the sense of something opposed to some 'reality'. *Distinctions*, and eventually also *reflection*, 'create' things of experience (or these things 'subsist' only 'supported by' the *distinguishing* 'minds') only in the sense that other people might experience things differently, while other beings might experience entirely different things.

But freedom of such a 'creation' does not mean arbitrariness or voluntariness. The *distinctions* made by ants reflect something of the world as much as the *distinctions* made by us. They are all relative (to those who *distinguish*) but, at the same time, fully objective. For what is *distinguished* is always a reflection of the *indistinct*, it comes *from* the *origin* and is made *into* it. Each *distinction* is made *from* the *indistinct* one, and this 'from' for ever leaves the stamp of objectivity on whatever is *distinguished*. Every *distinction* is a *distinction* of Being and hence a reflection of Being, it reflects the possibility of being *distinguished*.

146. So, "there can be no things with determinate natures unless there are true descriptions, and no true descriptions unless the intellect is already at work."<sup>228</sup> Adjusting the Plotinian vocabulary: every

---

<sup>226</sup>The 'mind' need not be God and can, of course, enter in various disguises. "That is, there is no thing which is in-itself in the sense of not being relative to the mind though things which are relative to the mind doubtless are, apart from that relation." [C. S. Pierce, *Some consequences of four incapacities*. p.68] They are 'apart from that relation' only because we imagine others who appear in our place with the same capacities to *distinguish*. This leads to Pierce's notion of reality (repeated by other prophets of consensus or ideal rationality), namely, "that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you" [Ibid. p.69], which further implies that "this conception essentially involves the notion of COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge." It was hardly Pierce's intention to make reality relative to a consensus, that is, eventually to a 'mind'. But, apparently, it did not take Durkheim to replace God with society. Starting with 'minds' opposed to 'reality' and then thinking the latter in terms of a 'totality of things', as is typically the case with the scientific bias, makes the reality appear as an inaccessible epistemological terminus, an 'ideal limit' of cognitive or experimental development. Pierce's 'reality' is the ghost of Kantian 'things in themselves', with their independence and immovability, which tries to overcome the impossibility of becoming flesh in the 'collection of *distinct* things' and process of discovery. Eventual consensus seems to provide a solution to this very impossibility. But do I need any consensus to *know* that the edge of the fiord at which I am standing is real? Do you need any consensus to *know* that the beauty of the view is real? The eventual reality is the *one* which *founds*, rather than is founded by, any possible community. All *distinctions* have their reality *founded in* the *one*. The distinctions between 'subjective' and 'objective', 'inner' and 'outer', or 'private' and 'common', are distinctions *within* the real, not ones founding it.

<sup>227</sup>We face here the possible ambiguity of the word "dependence" which can involve only necessary but also sufficient reasons. We tend to take "relativity" as meaning the necessary reasons – without *existence*, no *distinctions* – while "dependence" as causal dependence, meaning the sufficient reasons or efficient causes.

<sup>228</sup>S. R. L. Clark, *A Plotinian account of intellect*.

thing, everything that is, is relative to some (*distinguishing*) existence. The problem with accepting such a claim is the same as with imagining that something which is once *distinguished*, could remain undistinguished. Once a *distinction* has been made, it becomes ineradicable, unerasable – it can acquire entirely new sense, it can be modified, it can be declared ‘untrue’ or irrelevant, it can sink into deeper layers of *virtuality* – but once made it can not be un-made. This is the primal ground for the experience of objectivity (as well as for the not so infrequent insistence with which we stick to once acquired opinions). But this does not mean that we were not involved. Say, this table or the chair you are sitting on, if you died now, it still would be there, wouldn’t it? What does one mean by this “still”? One means that if, when you died, somebody else came here and looked, he would perceive this chair, too. Sure – it is not relative exclusively to *your existence*. But if only most primitive bacteria were left...? No! Even if nobody were around, the chair would still be there. It would be there, perhaps, in the sense of a potential *distinction* to be made by somebody capable of it. But if we imagine (let us keep imagining for a while) that until the end of the world the only living organisms were such that the presence or absence of this chair could not possibly make any difference to them, what sense would it make to say that it is there? As Berkeley observed, such an insistence on its being there, independently of you, me or anybody *distinguishing* it, harbours a vicious circularity. First we *distinguish* a thing and then pretend that it did not matter. But insisting on *this* thing being there is exactly saying that somebody might *distinguish* it again, in fact, is sticking to this very *distinction* in the very moment one tries to ignore it.<sup>229</sup> When one maintains that, if humankind died out, the same things would *still be* in the world, one assumes (as witnessed by “still”) a human existence in that world – departed by all humans – to whom these things still *are*, and are the same.

“For what precisely is meant by saying that the world existed before any human consciousness? An example of what is meant is that the earth originally issued from a primitive nebula from which the combination of conditions necessary to life was absent. But every one of these words, like every equation in physics, presupposes *our* pre-scientific experience of the world, and this reference to the world in which we *live* goes to make up the proposition’s valid meaning. Nothing will ever bring home to my comprehension what a nebula that no one sees could possibly be.”<sup>230</sup>

It is obvious that when I die, other people will continue living in the same world, that is, among the same things as I did. The world, although intimately *mine*, is not relative only to *myself* and most things in it are *distinguished* similarly by all people. But the world without *any* existence to differentiate it, the ‘objective world’ of physics where only things, *objects* or, perhaps, atoms or strings float around, in short, the world ‘in itself’ is an image, or rather a phantom – it is just *indistinctness*, into which one has projected some selected *distinctions*.

### 6.3.3. One is

Our uneasiness with such a generous notion of being comes from the expectation that being should be independent, should be exactly that which is *not* relative to our nor any other existence, that reality is *one* and the same for all. This requires a bit more precision: who are all, or else, independent from whom? Certainly, not only from *my existence*, not only from any particular existence. So, perhaps, from all *existences* of all people who ever lived and will live. We start suspecting something uneasy, don’t we? For why not exclude also relativity to all other living organisms? And then, not only to the actually living (future or past) *existences*, but also to the mere forms of all possible *existences*. If we follow such chains we end with the ‘things in themselves’ which, unknowable and inaccessible as they are, are nevertheless *posited* by reflection as the ultimate and truly ‘real’ objects.

Among other requirements for a ‘true Being’ one listed unchangeability, simplicity, self-identity, and all such were on various occasions ascribed to the particulars which one considered to be ‘truly existing’. From what we have said so far, no such things are to be expected. Yet the expectations do have their source – they are *traces* of the *originally*, but always also *actually, present indistinct*

<sup>229</sup>“[T]here is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them. I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it; but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive them? But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while?” [G. Berkeley, *A Treatise....* §23]

<sup>230</sup>M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. III:2

one. As Hegel observes following Berkeley, and Husserl following Hegel, even the *distinction* between thought and its object is a distinction relative to thought. But (and this is reminiscent of the ontological proof) this *distinction*, although made relatively to the distinguishing being, reflects the fundamental *distinction* of this very being, its *confrontation*: it is relative but not arbitrary, not to say merely ‘subjective’ – it is not only ‘within the mind’ (what could *that* mean?) for it signifies, it means something. It is an *actual sign* of the fundamental ontological *distinction*, of the fact of *existential confrontation* with *nothingness*. That this is impossible to establish from purely epistemological, that is *actual*, assumptions shows only that such assumptions are at best secondary. Indeed, the *subject-object distinction* is but the most *actual* form, the lowest *trace* of this *original separation* of one from one. The *existence* is constituted by *confrontation*; although all differentiation of the *indistinct* is relative to *existence*, it is differentiation of and in the *indistinct*, not in anybody’s mind. Thus, although we may live in different worlds, we always *share* the ultimate origin of *existence*. It lies beyond any *actual experience*, it lies above all particulars of our lives, but it is the ultimate pole of *existential confrontation*. Most things we are saying may remind about Berkeleyan, or sometimes transcendental idealism, but the bottom line, that is, the starting point is quite different. Perhaps, we might call it “transcendental realism”, for the *origin* of all differentiation itself *is*, and it is in the most *absolute* sense.<sup>231</sup>

148. But: if to be is to be *distinguished*, then one, as *indistinct*, is not. It certainly is not *a* being, is not a something. “Being must have some definition and therefore be limited; but the First cannot be thought of as having definition and limit, for thus it would not be the Source but the particular item indicated by the definition.”<sup>232</sup> But, as a matter of fact, it *is* – not by being defined but by being *distinguished* as the *indistinct*, it is *distinguished* from everything which, being differentiated, falls under the categories of *distinctions*. According to Eckhart it is even “*indistinct* from all things” and we can agree to that in the sense of it being *esse omnium*, the being of all things, that which is present “everywhere and everywhere entire.”<sup>233</sup> But this entire presence remains nevertheless entirely *transcendent* because, as undifferentiated *origin*, it is above all *distinctions*. It is *nothing* because it is *indistinct*, undifferentiated, but it is *distinguished* from

---

<sup>231</sup> Of course, this expression must not be taken in the sense given it by Kant. It stands here for almost exact opposite of the transcendental realism which “[a]fter wrongly supposing that objects of the senses, if they are to be external, must have an existence by themselves, and independently from the senses, [...] finds that, judged from this point of view, all our sensuous representations are inadequate to establish their reality.” [I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. I:2nd Division.2.Book 2.1.1st paralogism [A369]]

<sup>232</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.6

<sup>233</sup> Eckhart *Latin Sermons* Ga.III:16-22. [B. McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart... XXIX, God is one*]

all the distinctions, and so it “is not nothing, for this *nothing* has a name “nothing”.”<sup>234</sup>

So, is *indistinct* only by being *distinguished* as such? Although our point of departure is *birth* 149. *founding the confrontation*, that is, an indissoluble relation between the *existence* and the *one*, the latter retains also primacy in spite of this apparent dependence on the *existence*. “Not that God has any need of His derivatives: He ignores all that produced real, never necessary to Him, and remains identically what He was before He brought it into being.”<sup>235</sup>

- The *indistinct* is *one* and the same for all – “there can be only one such Being: if there were another, the two [as *indistinct*] would resolve into one, for we are not dealing with two corporal entities.”<sup>236</sup>
- It is immutable – no matter what *distinctions* are made, it remains unchanged beyond and *above* them, as the eternal horizon. All *distinctions* belong already to the world, and leave *indistinct* behind – unchanged, unaffected, untouched.<sup>237</sup> The *indistinct* *nothingness* does not diminish as a consequence of all *distinctions*, it does not shrink while science makes its progress; nor as God does in Isaac Luria’s process of «*tzimtzum*» (‘contraction’ or ‘withdrawal’), making place for the creation through the introvert act of self-limiting withdrawal; nor as the perfect mixture and unity of the elements, the Whole, has to dissolve, according to Empedocles, into the conflict of the active Love and Hate between the separated passive elements in order to make the emergence of phenomenal world possible. Spatial analogies may require shrinking or dissolution of the *indistinct* as the *distinctions* are made in its texture, but these are only spatial analogies.
- It is thus not only *indistinct* but indistinguishability-as-such, not something which has not

---

<sup>234</sup>Nicholas of Cusa, *Dialogue on the Hidden God*.

In the letter to Charlemagne, Fridugisus of Tours, *On the Being of Nothing and Shadows*, states this argument using his contemporary conceptual apparatus: If to the question ‘Is nothing something or not?’ one “answers ‘It seems to me to be nothing’, his very denial, as he supposes it, compels him to say that something is nothing, since he says ‘It seems to me to be nothing’ [...] But if it seems to be something, it cannot appear not to be in any way at all.” Then, “if ‘nothing’ is a name at all, as the grammarians claim, it is a finite name. but every finite name signifies something. [...] Again, ‘nothing’ is a significative word. But every signifying is related to what it signifies. [...] Every signifying is a signifying of that which is. But ‘nothing’ signifies something. Therefore...”

St. Anselm resolved this linguistic pseudo-difficulty in quite a Wittgensteinian way, namely, by pointing out that “the word ‘nothing’ in no way differs in meaning from the expression ‘not something’” which “indicates that every thing, whatever expresses any reality, should be excluded from the mind [...] So it is not necessary that nothing be something just because its name in a certain way signifies something; rather, it is necessary that nothing be nothing, because its name signifies something in this way.” [St. Anselm of Canterbury, *On the Fall of the Devil*. XI] Anselm’s nothing, i.e., “‘not something’ signifies no thing or reality”, it “puts aside something, without positing anything in the understanding.” [St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Philosophical Fragments*. C.3] But having nothing in understanding is just the right way of ‘comprehending the incomprehensible’, is the whole concept one might have of *nothingness*. Things, that is, *visibles*, and even less *actual* things and understandable thoughts, do not exhaust our notion of reality, *nothing* may still be both ‘no thing’ and real. Quite a similar possibility appears, for instance, in the formulation like “the unconditioned meaning viewed as an abyss of meaning.” [P. Tillich, *What is religion?*. I:1.1.e.]

The distinction between the creator and the creation – of central importance for all Abrahamic religions, for the ancient Greeks, Hindus and Buddhists, and one might be tempted to say, for all religion – appears, for instance, in R. Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason as “the distinction”*: everything except God is created by God and so is not God. Although creator and *indistinct* may seem to have nothing in common, the creation and the *distinguished* certainly have a lot. In our case, the difference between the two does not depend on any extraneous predicates but is almost analytical... In any case, *indistinct* may help to take care of the apparent problems with the names like “nothingness”, or the apparent paradoxes like that “it is the ‘unknowable’”, that it is “incomprehensibly understandable and unnameably nameable” [Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I:5], that “in every term’s signification God is signified – even though He is unsignifiable” [Nicholas of Cusa, *On Wisdom and Knowledge*. II:29], that “Its definition, in fact, could only be ‘the indefinable’” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.6]. No paradox seems to result from *distinguishing* the *indistinct* from all that is *distinguished*.

<sup>235</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.12. Eriugena expresses clearly the same thought that *immanence* and *transcendence* of God are not exclusive opposites but complementary aspects: “the Creative nature permits nothing outside itself because outside it nothing can be, yet everything which it has created and creates it contains within itself, but in such a way that it itself is other, because it is superessential, than what it creates within itself.” [J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. III:675C]

<sup>236</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:4.1. Agreeing on the conclusion, we certainly do not need Plotinus’ argument, and we prefer Eckhart’s observation that “all distinct things are two or more, but all indistinct things are one” (footnote 194). Having characterised God in one way or another, one often felt the need to ‘demonstrate’ that it (He?) must be only one. From this popular theme, we mention here only a few examples like Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* 766B-767A; St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion* 3; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I:q11.a3.]

<sup>237</sup>Stoics distinguished the universe from the whole. The differentiated and finite universe was surrounded by the infinite and immovable void. Only the two together constituted the whole.

been distinguished ‘as yet’, but something which by its very nature never can nor will be differentiated. It is, we can say, the ultimate limit of all *distinctions*, the limit beyond which no *distinctions* are ever drawn. As it happens, *unity* is exactly a limit of distinctions. As will be shown in Book II (especially, 1.1.2 and 2.2.3.i), in the sphere of relative ‘whats’ such a limit establishes the identity of a thing; here it is the *absolute unity* of the *one*.

- It is the *origin* of all *distinctions* – not necessarily in the sense of being the source emanating them in an eternal necessity or else creating them by an act of free will, but in any case in the sense that all *distinctions* are made into it and arise from it.
- And finally, preceding (in the order of *founding*) all *distinctions*, it is indeed not relative to them being made. It remains *above* them, as their horizon and source. But if no *distinctions* were made, then the only that would be there would be the *indistinct*. It is thus, both as *distinguished* from the *totality* of all *distinctions and* as not relative to any *distinctions*, that is, as *absolute*.

Notice that all the above (except the very last one) apparently positive characteristics are only the characteristics which, we might say, *indistinct* acquires in the *confrontation* with the *existence*. ‘In itself’ it is just ... *nothing*, or *indistinct*: “until creatures came into existence, God was not ‘God’, but was rather what he was.”<sup>238</sup>

A possible mode of expression: *quid sit is se esse*, its essence is its Being. We could accept this Scholastic mode of expression but only because ... it does not say anything. It is amazing how much ingenuity went on trying to either derive something from this empty idea or, on the other hand, to nevertheless apply more specific expressions to the *one* which, to begin with, was proclaimed unnameable, *esse purum et simplex*. *One*’s essence is its Being and its Being is *indistinct*. This *indistinctness* captures the primacy and independence of *one*; *indistinctness* is exactly that which is totally independent from any being, for any being appears only as a consequence of *distinctions* which do not affect the *indistinct*. Being (of the) *indistinct* is thoroughly independent from and unlimited by any being or beings. Absence of any relativity makes this *absolute Being*.<sup>239</sup> *Absoluteness*, absence of any relativity, means exactly that as far as it is concerned, it simply is, *esse purum et simplex*. All specific characterisations emerge only in relation to something else, a separate existence.

150. The *one is* and it is *above my existence, above any existence*. It is *transcendent*, ultimate reality which *founds* the reality of all specific things and *distinctions*. It is not something which merely ‘appears’, not to mention mere ‘appearing for me’ – in fact, it does not appear at all: as *indistinct* it can never appear. The constant presence of this *transcendence* is what makes it for ever impossible for us to accept various forms of mere immanentism, subjectivism, solipsism – we know *that* is, and we know *that* the more the less it ‘appears’ to our concepts and conceptual constructions.

We know *that* with unmistakable certainty but this does not imply any ‘what’ – we know *that* God is, but not *what* he is. We can say *that* there is, but ‘what it is’ is already the question about relative, more specific *distinctions*. The more specific and precise ‘whats’ we find in search for ‘objectivity’, the more they threaten with relativity – in fact, the more *objective* they appear, the more *subjective* they turn out to be. *Subjectivity* is exactly *actuality* and narrowing its scope in order to externalise the appearing *objects* does not help the least to reach something ‘truly objective’.

Insisting on *that* and opposing all ‘whats’ with respect to *one*, we are not trying to actually distinguish these two aspects which, as already Duns Scotus observed, can not be dissociated.<sup>240</sup> The inability to say ‘what’ is not due to our imperfect knowledge and limitations – it is simply because there is nothing to know about its ‘what in-itself’, because there is no ‘whatness’ beyond *that*, hidden from our view behind the eternal veil. Even God in Himself is ignorant of God’s essence. This ‘ignorance’ is exactly the proper knowledge of *that*, of the fact that *one* is none

<sup>238</sup>Eckhart *German Sermons*, Matt.V:3. [O. Davis, ed., *Selected Writings* 22, J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., *Meister Eckhart... 52]*

<sup>239</sup>Indian counterpart to “I am that I am” [Ex. III:14] is uttered by Krishna: “Know that with one single fraction of my Being I pervade and support the Universe, and know that *I am*.” [*The Bhagavad-Gita*. X:42]

<sup>240</sup>E.g., “For I never know anything to exist unless I first have some concept of that of which existence is affirmed.” [J. Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*. I:d3.q1] Of course, we replace “concept” by ‘what’, and the *equipollence* of the two is just the *equipollence* of *that* and ‘what’ in every *distinction*.

of the things of creation, that it involves no *distinctions* which first can provide any material for (knowing) ‘what’.

“He surpasses every intellect and all sensible and intelligible meanings Who is better known by not knowing, of Whom ignorance is the true knowledge.”<sup>241</sup> “But sacred ignorance teaches me that what seems nothing to the intellect is the incomprehensible maximum.”<sup>242</sup> “We do not, it is true, grasp it by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly void of it; we hold it not so as to state it, but so as to be able to speak about it. And we can and do state what it is not, while we are silent as to what it is [...]”<sup>243</sup> Admirable as such quotations may be, they still indicate the assumption that beyond, behind, above, there hides something which we can not grasp, although one can not let thinking of it as something ‘graspable’. Treating the *one* as an epistemological limit, turns it into something relative and underlies the *objectivistic illusion*, according to which there is actually something to be known, some ‘essence of all things’, some ‘maximum’, which isn’t known only because of the finitude of our mind or whatever limitations one wants to postulate. Eventually, such a ‘one’ threatens with becoming a mere *totality*, a pantheistic ‘substance’.

Inheriting the apophatic features constitutive for its predecessor, late Hellenic henotheism, negative theology says that all names are inadequate.<sup>244</sup> Certainly, there is no need for names. But pretending that something hides, that *one* is more than the *indistinct* background, is to project the assumed possibility of *distinguishing*, if not any particular *distinctions*, into the *indistinct*. It *transcends* our being in this simple sense that this being is constituted by *birth* and *distinctions*. However, it is not merely an epistemological limit beyond which no *distinction* is possible. One can always draw more *distinctions* without in the slightest affecting the *absoluteness* of the *one*, without approaching any limit. It is *that* which is never *distinguished*, no matter how many *distinctions* we have made. It is the residual site which always and forever remains *indistinct*. It is *indistinct* and this is the whole and only truth one can and need say about it. This is the only way of limiting it against that which ‘delimits’ it – the world of *distinctions*.<sup>245</sup>

As there is no ‘what’ to be known there, as there are no *distinctions*, the *one* seems to be an arbitrary invention. And indeed, it is – if one needs proofs or arguments; any such involve distinctions which never reach *one*. Being *indistinct* means, in particular, that it never appears, not to mention appearing *for* consciousness. Although it underlies all phenomena, it is itself trans-phenomenal. We would probably have to disagree with Heidegger that the “specific element of phenomenological understanding is that it is capable of understanding something non-understandable, exactly when it radically leaves it in its non-understandability.”<sup>246</sup> The eventual non-understandable is also trans-phenomenal and we don’t need phenomenology to understand something non-phenomenal. In the moment we try to ‘think’ or ‘intuit’ (*anschauen*) *one*, it becomes an empty word, a pure nothingness – it refuses to appear. One could try claiming that it is *just this withdrawal* which is the phenomenon of the *one*, that “exactly when the Letting-be in a particular way lets a being to which it relates be, and hence unveils it, it veils being in general.”<sup>247</sup> This, however, is not any phenomenon but only an aspect of every phenomenon. The meaning of the trans-phenomenal is

<sup>241</sup>J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. I 510B

<sup>242</sup>Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I 17/51

<sup>243</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:3.14

<sup>244</sup>The Christian origin of negative theology must be, of course, taken with serious reservations. Etienne Gilson, in a truly apologetic spirit, would like to detect Christian roots even of neo-Platonism itself, observing that Origen “[s]tudied under Ammonius Saccas, in whose school he perhaps knew Plotinus.” [E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*.... II:1.2.footnote 14] Observing such common influences, one should however mention also the persons like Numenius of Apamea who acting in the II-nd century contributed to, if not was chiefly responsible for, the transition from platonic idealism to neo-Platonic synthesis. As every irresolvable issue, we prefer to leave this one to the scholars and speak generally about negative theology, whether of Greek or Christian flavour.

<sup>245</sup>“The ur-object, the absolute is not something yet not determined nor yet not determinable, but something which by its very nature is devoid of any determinations as such.” [M. Heidegger, *Philosophical Fundaments of Medieval Mysticism*. Irrationality of Meister Eckhart] In short, “[t]he human mind possesses an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God.” [B. Spinoza, *Ethics*. II:47] Of course, there is hardly anything in common between our and Spinoza’s understanding of ‘the eternal and infinite essence’ or its ‘adequate knowledge.’

<sup>246</sup>M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion*. Supplement to §18-19

<sup>247</sup>M. Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*. V. «Gerade indem das Seinlassen im einzelnen Verhalten je das Seiende sein läßt, zu dem es nicht verhält, und es damit entbirgt, verbirgt es das Seiende im Ganzen.» It is, indeed, like hearing that the “unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth [...] thou must not disclose to any of the uninitiated, by whom I mean those who cling to the objects of human thought, and imagine there is no super-essential reality beyond, and fancy that they know by human understanding Him that has made Darkness His secret place.” [Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology*. I]

itself trans-phenomenal.

Except for this small (anti-)phenomenological proviso, we retain Heidegger's main statement about importance of understanding by leaving not-understood, for indeed it "is better known by not knowing [when] ignorance is the *true* knowledge". Its certainty is the same as the certainty of my existence, and this has nothing to do with adequate or inadequate presentations in any acts of intuition or apprehension. (This certainty itself might be, perhaps, analysed phenomenologically.) It is the most fundamental ontological notion, not any supra-essential incomprehensibility but *nothingness* – in the fully *positive* sense of this apparently negative word, as the undifferentiated, virtual origin. It is *nothing* but "this *nothing* is not nothing, for it has the name "nothing"."

152. It is not any 'thing in itself' which epistemology has to invent realising its self-reduction to 'objective' knowledge, which immediately threatens with complete 'subjectivity'. It is not any unknowable, inaccessible *x*. It is perfectly well known, if only we allow ourselves such a (mis)use of the verb "to know": we know *that*, we know *that* is. This irrevocable certainty, *equipollent* with the certainty *that I exist*, has only one counterpart – the certainty *that we will die*. These seem to be the only *absolutely* certain things in life. The only things and, as a matter of fact, one and the same thing. *That* which is, becoming *present* through *birth*, is the *transcendence above* the *existence*. To *exist*, to be *confronted* means thus also to know *that I am finite*. (Sorry for misusing the word "know" again. We can reformulate it: to *exists* means to live the fact *that I am not the master*.) One can, in principle, imagine a finite being which begins at some time but never ends. But this is, at least here, but an empty, abstract image, "that which has become has also, necessarily, an end."<sup>248</sup> Beginning is the end – they are but temporally differentiated epitomes of the ultimate *transcendence*.<sup>249</sup>

*Separation by birth* founds thus the fundamental certainties of life. These, deriving from the confrontation with *transcendence*, have all 'negative' character. I know that I will die, but I do not know when, how. I know that I can not control everything, but there is hardly anything particular which I could not, at least in principle, bring under my control. And so on, and so on. The lack of 'positive' content in such certainties opens in fact the horizon of concrete freedom – it expresses only the ultimate *that above* any 'what', leaving 'whats' to the actual relativity of existence.

153. Delegating 'reality' out of the sphere of 'knowledge' to 'things in themselves' is as good as 'bracketing' it in order to save the tranquility of undisturbed epistemological ruminations. One might imagine us doing essentially the same, by postulating eventual reality of some *transcendent* one. However, the intention, tendency and the conceptual unfolding are exactly the opposite. If various members of this epistemic family ('bracketings', 'in-itselfisms', and likewise scepticisms) did not pretend that any certainty, which ultimately is the certainty of *that*, could be found again among some 'whats', it was only because they could not believe that it could be found at all. If we have only access to mere appearances, what hope can we have for any certainty? For *if* it could be found, then it was *only* here, among that to which we have access, our appearances – beyond the horizon of these visible 'whats' there remains only the unknown and uncertain. And since 'Being does not add anything to the concept' one could and should dispense with it. We take the opposite stand saying rather that no concept adds anything (of significance) to Being; and the concept of Being (if we have any) is *only* a concept, trying to indicate its meaning: the *indistinct* is not 'unknown' waiting for a successful conceptualisation – it is known perfectly well, as the *indistinct*, as the *absolute that*. It is not uncertain but, on the contrary, the most certain of certainties which *transcends* any relative *distinctions* and, in particular, any *actual distinctions* of reason. Perhaps, this certainty means only that, eventually, everything *visible* is only relative and hence uncertain. Perhaps, but there is more to it and we will return to it in Book III.

For the time being, we do not 'bracket' the 'reality', we do not 'bracket' the Being *above* existence. We only 'bracket' everything that critiques wanted to save for the rational knowledge, everything that *epoché* was supposed to leave untouched – all the *distinctions* in their relativity to existence. We do not by this token refuse them real being, we do not reduce them to mere 'appearances' – their being, founded in the one, is perfectly real, and their 'whatness' may be perfectly *objective*. We only refuse that they are the place of any *absolute* 'objectivity' – except for their being, they are relative to the *distinguishing* existence. And so, with few exceptions,

<sup>248</sup> Anaximander DK 12A15 [after Aristotle, *Physics*.203b9]

<sup>249</sup> One might probably list some other certainties of the similar kind, like the fact *that I can not control everything*, and the like. But these are only variations over the same theme of the *absolute that*.

we ‘bracket’ their relevance to our considerations. Thus, if we were to stick to the Husserlian metaphor, we do not ‘bracket’ anything after all: we are not after any *visible* explanations which would force us to ‘bracket’ the inexplicable; we are not after *actuality* of adequate intuitions, after ‘seeing’, which would force us to ‘bracket’ the trans-phenomenal; we are not after any specific ‘essences’ which would force us to ‘bracket’ the significance of the fundamental experiences of existence.

In short, things indeed are what they seem to be, they are as they appear, because they appear exactly by being, that is, by being *distinguished*. But above things there is the immovable origin, the eternal source which, in the visible terms, amounts to the ever present possibility of meeting something new, finding more. The art of living is the art of drawing the borders and everybody has to find the border between these two aspects so that the *visible* is not threatened by the hidden. *Actual* knowledge remains for ever partial and incomplete, because the *non-actual* sphere is not reducible to the precisely *visible* categories. But incompleteness is not any lack, is not any ‘subjectivity’ to be overcome; when treated this way it is only a *sign* of the desire to reduce the irreducible. The ‘truly objective’, in the sense of absolutely independent, ultimately inaccessible, beyond and above any *subject* and ‘subjectivity’ is only the *indistinct nothingness*. But inaccessibility does not mean here that it is completely beyond experience, that no existence can ever come in ‘touch’ with it. It means only that the *distinctions* constituting the contents of any existence never reach it, that all ‘whats’ remain forever below the ultimate *that*. *Existence* is in fact defined by the *confrontation* with it and so we know it, for we know *that* it is, we only can not know ‘what’ it is – simply, because it *only is*, undisturbed and unaffected by anything, as indifferent as undifferentiated.

154.

### 6.3.3.i. Asymmetry of being

One is, but we are very far from saying that it is all that is. The first *distinction* is that between the *indistinct* and the differentiated, and everything that is *distinguished*, the whole ‘sublunar world’ *is*, too. We won’t dwell on various kinds and hierarchies of beings, on species and genera, but we want to register a dimension of possible distinction which will be of relevance to us.

The fundamental distinction concerns ‘being’ vs. *existence*. *Existence* is separated directly from the *one*, not as its part, but rather an image, in any case, as a *confrontation*. As such, it is not relative to anything except the *one* from which it emerges. ‘Being’ of all other beings means to be *distinguished*, i.e., it is relative to the *one* who *distinguishes*. What may matter then is what something is *distinguished* from.

*X* being *distinguished* from *Y* means that ‘*X* is *Y*’ and this (one might be tempted to say: relation) is asymmetric. In the most crude sense of a copula, the fact that ‘this pen is blue’ says something about its being, but this does not mean that ‘blue is this pen’. We might say that such a predication is not merely an assignment of some accidents to some substance, but actually amounts to *distinguishing* this pen from other blue things, and that this is what accounts for its ‘being’ blue. But at such a level of *actualities*, distinction has also often the character of a ‘distinction against’, as when saying that “this pen is not that ball”, and we should not attach all too much meaning to the verbal expressions which may easily lead to confusion of ‘being’ and ‘not being’. It may, indeed, be a sign of pantheism to say that *omni determinatio est negatio*, for in such a case we seem to have only one, as if horizontal dimension, where things may be only more or less, larger or smaller parts of the whole, and where they are distinguished only mutually from each other.

Important differences in ‘being’ depend not on how big a part of some imagined, though unimaginable totality, *X* is, nor against which other particular *Y* it is distinguished, but on the background from which it is *distinguished* or, more specifically, at what level of *founding* it is *distinguished*.

156.

The most fundamental *distinction* is *birth, separation* from the *one*, yielding units from the *unity, henads* from the *monad*. Being *separated* from *one*, *existence* *is one*. But this does not mean that *one* is the *separated* being; in fact, it is not, for it is just the *transcendence* which makes the *existence* ‘be’ – not by coinciding with it but by *confronting* it. (Cf. the remarks on the primacy of the *indistinct* in *confrontation*, §149.) “I am not in them; they are in Me.”<sup>250</sup> says

<sup>250</sup> *The Bhagavad-Gita*. VII:12

Krishna about all the states of created beings. Misusing the pantheistic mode of speaking, one might say that *one* is ‘more-than’ existence, but we understand this ‘more-than’ rather as the *confronting transcendence*. All other ways of ‘being’, down to the most *actual* predicative copula, repeat this asymmetric pattern and are founded in the primordial separation.<sup>251</sup>

Chaos, the primordial element of existence, as the first hypostasis, *is one*. But *one* is not *chaos*, it remains above and beyond *chaos*, as the *transcendent unity* of differentiation. Speaking a bit paradoxically, the *one* is the limit beyond which *chaos* ceases to be *chaos* – it is only by being its own limit that something at all ‘*is*’. *Experience*, arising from *chaos*, *is chaos*. This does not mean that it is chaotic, only that *chaos* underlies it, is its *founding* element. And again, being such a *founding* element, it remains beyond and above *experience* – *chaos* is not *experience*, but it may appear as the horizon which limits the *experience*. Finally, *reflective experience* with its beings-at-hand is *experience* but not vice versa; *experience* is the limit of *reflection*, usually called “its beginning”. In short, “there is from the first principle to ultimate an outgoing in which unfailingly each principle retains its own seat while its off-shot takes another rank, a lower, though on the other hand every being is in identity with its prior as long as it holds that contact.”<sup>252</sup>

157. The asymmetry of being corresponds to the fact that higher level, *founding* the lower one and thus constituting its ‘*being*’, is not accessible to the categories of the lower level. The unity of the higher level is at best reflected only as some ideal *totality* of the *distinctions* of the lower level, but such *totalities* never sum up to yield the *unity* they only imperfectly reflect. Put a bit differently, if ‘*X* is *Y*’, the asymmetry means that *Y* *transcends X*, is *above X*. But at the same time, *X* is ‘in’ *Y*, participates in it, and thus *Y* is thoroughly present, *immanent*. Thus although, for *X*, *Y* appears remote and inaccessible, it is in fact most intimate and close. Taken to the extreme, every *existence* is *one* but *one*, seen from the perspective of the *actual existence*, is remote and *transcendent*. “Nothing, however, is completely severed from its prior.”<sup>253</sup> Confrontation with it constitutes the very being of *existence*, and thus *one* is most intimately present around it.

### 6.3.3.ii. Against pantheism

158. Everything is *one* before it becomes two. All *distinctions* originate from *one*, and this might make one think of *one* as the mere sum of everything. But Being is asymmetric – every thing is (from) the *one* but *one* is not everything. It is not any sum, not any *actual* totality – it is the *virtual origin*. *Totality of distinctions* is only that – a *totality*. It does not sum up to any *unity*, because it does not sum up at all. “Everything” is but an expression we find for *nothingness* in the differentiated world of feelings and concepts, eventually, of *reflection*. But this “everything”, meaning indeed the totality of things, points to *nothingness*, their unity which in no sense belongs to *this world*. It is, in fact, thoroughly *transcendent*, for once the *distinctions* dispersed the *one*, to reflect it eventually as the *totality* of ‘*everything*’, *nothingness* withdrew and remains *above*, unreachable through the categories of *distinctions*.<sup>254</sup> “The First remains intact even when other entities spring from it.”<sup>255</sup>
159. Although *absolutely transcendent* and never *actual*, *one* remains *present* in everything by virtue of being the *origin*. For as the lower hypostases bring us more and more within the sphere of *actuality*, the higher hypostases do not disappear as stages of a development to be left behind, but remain *present*. In more *actual* terms, we might say that they remain *present* as the horizon surrounding, and lending *unity* to the *totality* of the lower level. *Actual presence* of the *one* is merely as the horizon of distinguishability, the horizon beyond which no more *distinctions* are made and whence all new *distinctions* emerge.

<sup>251</sup> “[P]redicative ‘*is*’, used in the context of theoretical explication, has its source in the original ‘I am’, and not vice versa.” [M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion*. II:3,§24]

<sup>252</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:2.2

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. V:2.1

<sup>254</sup> Thus, not even the label “panentheism” is appropriate to the extent it involves any spatial associations of a universe somehow ‘contained within’ the God. Absolutisation of feeling, as it often happens in modern forms of panpsychism following panentheism (e.g., Gustav Fechner, Alfred North Whitehead), or of life as it happens in the organicistic analogy of Charles Hartshorne, amount to a conflation of the *transcendent unity* of the world with the *totality* of its (feeling, living) contents – the identification characteristic for pantheism. But to the extent panentheism points towards the intimate presence of God and his *both* aspects – transcendence and immanence – the label might be acceptable.

<sup>255</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.5

No matter what and how many *distinctions* populate our world, this world is surrounded by the sphere of the *indistinct*. This sphere is not merely something which is not-yet-distinguished but something which is the indistinguishability-as-such. New *distinctions* can emerge from it without ever diminishing its character and scope, without ever violating its *absolute transcendence*, its *original indistinctness*. The more and more precise *distinctions*, entering gradually the sphere of visibility, leave by this very token behind and above them the *indistinct origin* which surrounds them as a horizon from which always more new *distinctions* can emerge.

*Birth, confronting existence with its origin*, preserves the latter – the existence is separated from the origin. But being thus separated from the origin does not mean to be its part. Neither existences nor other *distinctions* sum up to some posited *totality* of the absolute; on the contrary, every existence has a full contact with the absolute, participating in it. *Participation* (in the current, merely ontological sense) means simply the constant presence of one in every existence – analytically, since existence is just the confrontation with the one. Yet, as will be elaborated in 6.4.2.i, one is present only through *chaos* and further hypostases. *Existential confrontation* happens only through these lower levels, eventually, it finds always place in the *actual situation*. The presence of one is an aspect of every *actual experience*, and thus it is always experienced but it is never the *actual object* of any experience. 160.

*Participation* has nothing to do with ‘being a part’, as the Latin etymology might suggest. Parts do not participate in their *totality*, they form or constitute it. *Participation* corresponds rather to the Greek *metousia* which means ‘to have being after’, as we say, ‘to be founded by’. True, to be a part is an aspect of being *distinguished*, but only in so far as we imagine objects extracted from the background. But a *distinguished* being is not a part of the *indistinct* but only of the differentiated world – by the very token of being *distinguished*, it ceases to be a part of the *indistinct*.

According to pantheism, being a part is the primordial mode of participation. Pantheism assumes that the background is somehow given as already differentiated. It identifies, on the one hand, the *transcendent indistinct* with the *visibly distinguished* and, on the other hand, this *visibly* differentiated with the *totality* of basic entities. In this respect it is similar to empiricism, and it steps beyond empiricism only by postulating the *totality* of all differences (and ascribing them some divinity). 161.

It takes severe *objectivistic illusion* to make these identifications. If we were to emphasize these distinctions, along with the distinction between being and existing, we could say:

- i. to be is to be *distinguished* – and as such to be a part of the differentiated world, relative to *existence* but also, by the same token, not to be a part of the *indistinct*;
- ii. to exist is to be a *distinguished* image of the *origin, imago Dei* – not in the sense of being a part of it, but of being *founded* by *participation* in it; to some extent, to be like it, in that *nothingness of self* and *nothingness* of the one are the same, but primarily only in the sense of being its *separated reflection*, an event of a direct *confrontation* with it, §3, p. 1.

We observed in §157 that *one*, being most intimately *present* and *immanent* is also, unlike a pantheistic substance, ultimately *transcendent*. *One* is present not in every thing but only *behind* every thing; not because every thing is ‘its part’, but because every thing points to it, being surrounded by the *invisible rest* which eventually leads to its *origin*. Likewise existence is not ‘a part’ of it but *participates* in it, is its image in the sense of being eventually constituted by the *confrontation* with it. Remaining undifferentiated (and indifferent) above not only the *totality* of all *distinctions* but also the *existences* through which things come forth, *one* is ultimately *transcendent*, inaccessible to any *actual look*. At the same time, it is most intimately *present*, as the site of every *existential unity* and the ultimate horizon from which everything originates and in which it *participates*. “All these things are the One and not the One: they are He because they come from Him; they are not He, because it is in abiding by Himself that he gives them.”<sup>256</sup> 162.

<sup>256</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:2.2 [translated by A. H. Armstrong]

## 6.4 Virtuality

### 6.4.1. Two kinds of causes

163. As Plato, or rather his neo-Platonic version, had been sieved through the Aristotelian categories, the distinct hypostases and stages of emanation became gradually replaced by various kinds of ‘causes’: the One became the Primordial Cause, the multiplicity of *henads* became a multiplicity of Primary Causes, then secondary causes, etc. Of course, things were not so simple and to reflect the essentially different order of *founding* one had to significantly adjust the four causes of Aristotle. John Duns Scotus for instance, divided the *ordo essentialis*, concerning the ontological order of being, into *ordo eminentiae* and *ordo dependentiae*.<sup>257</sup> Unfortunately, the same words are used for ‘causality’ in both (as well as other) orders and this may easily cause confusion. Nevertheless, the ‘causality’ in the order of excellence or, as we might say, of *founding*, is certainly of different kind than that in the order of dependence. With some good will, the later could be said to correspond to usual causality while the former to the hierarchy of *virtuality*, of higher and lower levels of Being.<sup>258</sup> A form of causality in *ordo eminentiae* might then be interpreted as *actualisation of virtuality*.
164. *Actualisation of virtuality* is to be sharply distinguished from the actualisation *à la* Aristotle which only materialises one among the given possibilities.

The *origin* does not actually contain all the hypostases – they are present only *virtually*. This, as with Bergson, is the difference between ‘possibility’ and ‘virtuality’. The former contains its realisations in their actual form, so to speak ready-made, and realisation is a mere selection or, in the case of general concepts, specialisation and, eventually, individuation by a mysterious conjunction of immaterial form with matter. But the relation between higher and lower, the *founding* and the *founded*, is not that of the general to the particular, that of instantiation and specialisation. It is the relation of expression, possibly of incarnation, and in the ontological form addressed so far, that of *actualisation*. *Virtuality of birth* is the very site of individuality which contains only potentially its *actualisations* and *actualisation* is differentiation. In particular, what emerges as its result is entirely different from, in no way similar to that from which it emerged.<sup>259</sup> What Plotinus says about ‘forms’ applies to *distinctions* arising in the process of *actualisation*:

<sup>257</sup>J. Duns Scotus, *A Treatise on God as First Principle* I:6-I:9. Only slightly different classification of causes can be found in J. Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* I:d2.q1 [The existence of God].

<sup>258</sup>These are, of course, remote analogies, not any detailed relations. “[W]e may distinguish two sorts of causes, the one divine and the other necessary” [Plato, *Timaeus*. my: III.37] could be taken as the original form of this distinction.

<sup>259</sup>The example, so beloved by the hylomorphic dualists, of a “perfect artisan [who] has a distinct knowledge of everything to be done before he does it” [J. Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*. I:d2.q1.a2] hardly applies to any more genuine creative activity than a mere construction work following plans and drawings made usually by somebody else. An artist does not have any precise, ready-made ‘form’ in mind which he so ‘applies’ to the ‘matter’ ‘actualising’ its ‘possibility’. Starting a work he will typically have a more or less vague intuition which lacks any precise form. Indeed, “how irritating is this introductory phase when one has to fetch from within the first shape of the work, so awkward, not yet enriched with all the tiny inspirations which the pen will only encounter later on.” [W. Gombrowicz, *The Diaries*. 1957:II] The process of artistic work is exactly the process through which this vague intuition for the first time finds an actual form and expression; it is like birth and not like causation. “A true artwork emerges «from the artist» in an arcane, mysterious and mystical way. Detached from him, it becomes an independent live, a personality...” [W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. VIII] Whether this happens during the actual performance of the work of art, or else in advance, does not matter nor does it change the basic structure of *actualising a virtuality*, rather than ‘realising’ a ‘possibility’. “[T]he artist himself goes to back, after all, to that wisdom in Nature which is embodied in himself; and this is not wisdom built up of theorems but one totality, not a wisdom consisting of manifold detail co-ordinated into a unity but rather a unity working out into detail.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:8.5] The insistence on plain *visibility* in search of explanations can not admit such mysteriously *virtual* elements. It pervades all attempts at reductions, the most recent one being that of thought to its expression. “What happens when we make an effort – say in writing a letter – to find the right expression for our thoughts? [...] Now if it were asked: «Do you have thought before finding the expression?», what would one have to reply? And what, to the question: «What did the thought consist in, as it existed before its expression?»” [L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:335] The latter question can be, indeed, hard to answer precisely, but this need not imply negative answer to the former. The lack of *actual* linguistic expression need not mean the lack of any expression. The very *effort* to find the *right expression* is itself an expression of some *presence*.

A ‘possibility’ is a category of *actuality*, it is something definite and *actual*, even if only potentially. *Virtuality* should be distinguished not only from ‘possibility’, but even from latency, which is a kind of middle notion. Latency does not contain a ready-made result of its future actualisation and in this it resembles *virtuality*. But it has only one, or very few, possible actualisation(s), so that these can be determined and predicted in advance. Thus, like ‘possibilities’, latency moves within the determinations of *actuality*.

"Form is only a trace of that which has no form: indeed, it is the latter which engenders form."<sup>260</sup>

The virtual origin is a nexus of aspects which cannot be dissociated from each other without changing their character. Actualisation amounts exactly to such a dissociation, giving rise to new elements and forms and, in most general case, to new levels of being. We have illustrated this general process in Sections 1 through 4, and we have seen several examples of more specific nexuses giving, eventually, rise to various elements of actuality (e.g., one-signification-sign-sign as a sign; one-simultaneity-spatio-temporality-space&time; confrontation-awareness-consciousness-reflection). 165.

There are, though, no clear lines separating one level from another, just like there are no definite limits separating a baby from a child, a child from an adolescent. All is a continuous process without sharp boundaries except those used for the purpose of description. Nevertheless, the distinctions of nature, which we ascribe to different levels, are thoroughly real, just as is the difference between an adult and a child. They mark emergence of more differentiated systems from the prior nexuses of aspects, of more involved and sharply distinguished elements, which were present only as a virtual germ at the previous levels. The nature of a new level can not be explained in terms of the previous ones, it can not even be understood in such terms. It requires new concepts for expressing a more complex interplay of several aspects. In this sense, there is a qualitative 'spring' between levels. Yet, viewed as stages of the process of differentiation and actualisation of the virtual origin, they are but distinctions of degree.

Most importantly, all levels belong to every experience, all preceding levels and forms of transcendence remain present, though not actual. The successive stages are not passed to be left behind – they accumulate. "We have not been cut away; we are not separate; [...] we breath and hold our ground because the Supreme does not give and pass but gives on for ever, so long as it remains what it is."<sup>261</sup> Results of earlier separations are gathered underneath the later ones. Beyond the actual horizon of each relation, there remains the background – not only as merely 'more objects' of the same kind, but as something truly inaccessible to this new form of relation, as an "indefinite murmur of being"<sup>262</sup> under the newly emerged, newly differentiated, visible surface of things. 166.

This means that every actuality remains involved in the nexus from which it emerged and interwoven with the other aspects. Even if, at the actual level, the aspects have been completely dissociated, the presence of the whole nexus is marked by a trace which, usually, takes on the form of a relation between the dissociated and substantialised entities (e.g., the 'relation' of meaning between the abstract sign and the signified, which is the trace of sign; the relation after which is the trace of the unity dissociated into subject and object; the objective space and time 'relating' distinct 'places' and 'nows' as the traces of spatio-temporality). Something similar to a trace was called by James a "conjunctive relation".<sup>263</sup> The fact that X appears (always) with Y shows the relation of 'withness' which is as real an element of experience as are X and Y. The fact that, e.g., knower and known always go together, that continuous transition involves a very close, inner connection between its phases, are to be taken as facts of experience showing "different degrees of intimacy". The degree of intimacy might be taken as the inverse of the degree of dissociation, though James would not ascribe to it ontological priority we ascribe to nexuses. A more genuine analogy may be found in Duns Scotus' *distinctio formalis*: the 'formal distinctions' are distinctions between aspects which, although formally distinguishable and truly distinct, remain really inseparable.<sup>264</sup> It is equally crucial to us to keep the trace of the nexus from which all aspects

<sup>260</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:7.33. Although Plotinian emanations follow some principle of similarity, one should not confuse that with any kind of causality. Commenting on V:9.2 "What then is it which makes a body beautiful?" a scholar remarks "I take here *to poiesan* as meaning 'the principle responsible for the existence of an instantiated character in its bearer', which amounts to excluding both the meaning of efficient cause – in so far as this involves deliberation and change – and the one of creative cause – in so far as this conveys the idea of a beginning out of nothing. None of these meanings fits well, with the Plotinus' account of the causality of the intelligible principles." [C. D. Costa, *Separation and the forms: a Plotinian approach*. II:footnote 29] Thus, both emanations and our 'emergence from virtuality' are quite distinct from causality.

<sup>261</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:9.9. Likewise, albeit a bit metaphorically, the fruit contains in itself the seed from which it arises: "the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself [...] the fruit of a tree yielding seed" [Gen. I:11/I:29]

<sup>262</sup> E. Levinas

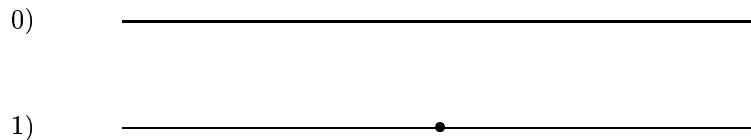
<sup>263</sup> W. James, *A World of Pure Experience*

<sup>264</sup> They are not, however, mere distinctions of reason alone, *distinctio rationis tantum*, which Scotus considers to be caused by the reason as, say, the distinction between a definition and the thing defined. Thus, for instance, soul was formally distinguished into its faculties, but even God could not posit will as something existing without soul and its other faculties. A predecessor of this idea can be discerned in Plotinus' hierarchy of (the concepts of)

emerge, as it was for Scotists to stick to the unitary reality of formally distinguished aspects. The difference here may concern the fact that, in our case, differentiation and even *dissociation* does take place and may have significant consequences: only by differentiation can a *nexus* give rise to something new, staying however unchanged and the same above its differentiated contents.

*Nexus* is not a term of explanation, for Cartesian explanations are its exact opposites; it does not provide sufficient reasons nor efficient causes. It is the term of the origin, indicating only that some things go together, not in a mere ‘togetherness’, but in a most intimate and original closeness – even if we can *dissociate* them and *posit* them as independent entities, they remain inseparably bound together by their origin in the same *nexus*. *Nexus*es are like *logoi spermatikoi* of Stoics, the ‘rational seeds’ of active matter which, after every turn of the Great Year when cosmos has again dissolved in the elemental fire, *ekpyrosis*, initiate its regeneration always following their immanent principles of growth. Commenting on Parmenides’ poem, a scholar remarks: “Parmenides creates here the impression of the archaic argumentation in which, once the system and the convictions are given, the premises and conclusions tend to appear in the presentation as merely put next to each other.”<sup>265</sup> *Nexus* is the central element of such an archaic understanding which does not attempt to *dissociate* things and make them more *precise*, but rather to keep them as *vague* as they originally appear in the barely differentiated but as-yet-not-*dissociated* mixture of mutual dependencies, “opposites that still are not opposed.”<sup>266</sup> The ultimate *nexus*, “[t]he One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things, not all things, but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence; for in a way they do occur in the One; or rather they are not there yet, but they will be.”<sup>267</sup>

167. The series of drawings below captures some of the essential aspects of our development. We should speak here in three dimensions, with plane representing the *one* and sphere the developing existence but, for simplicity, let us draw it in two dimensions.<sup>268</sup>



The line 0) represents the *indistinct one* and the point • in 1) the *birth*. The born being begins to ‘grow’ which is represented by the gradually larger circles. The main analogy concerns some properties of this, so called stereographic projection, which become effective in the moment the

---

numbers. On the one hand, (the lowest) numbers stand for mere quantity: “You take one thing with another [...] a dog and a man, or two men; or you take a group and affirm ten, a decad of men: in this case the number affirmed is not a Reality, even as Reality goes in the sphere of sense, but is purely Quantity.” On the other hand, there are true and essential numbers which precede and found their quantitative applications: for “the case is different when you consider one man in himself and affirm a certain number, duality, for example, in that he is at once living and reasoning [...] this is another kind of number; number essential; even the duality so formed is no posterior; it does not signify a quantity apart from the thing but the quantity in the essence which holds the thing together.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:6.16]

<sup>265</sup> G. Calogero, *Studi sull'eleatismo*. [«In der Tat erweckt Parmenides hier den Eindruck des archaischen Argumentierens, wo die Prämisse und die Folgerungen, wenn das System und die Überzeugung einmal da sind, dazu neigen, in der Exposition bloß nebeneinander gestellt zu werden.»]

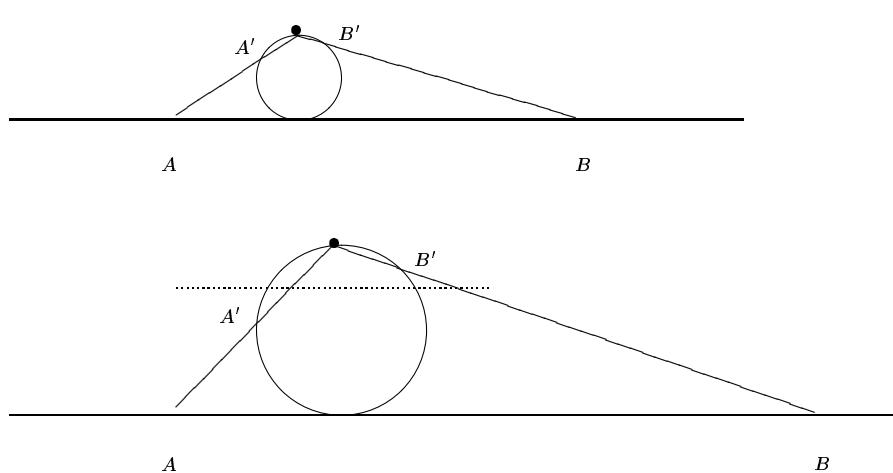
<sup>266</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:6.3

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. V:2.1 [translation of A. H. Armstrong]

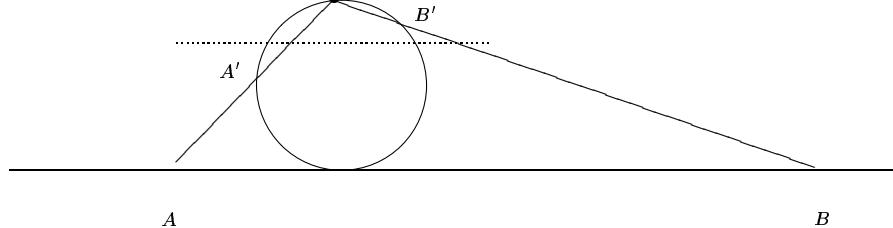
<sup>268</sup> As usual, one should be careful with not pushing such analogies too far where they necessarily break down. However, they can often be quite useful, if only taken with a bit of salt.

point turns into a circle (for instance in 2).

2)



3)



There is, namely, a one-to-one correspondence between *all* the points on the infinite line and all the points on the circle. The mapping is obtained by, starting with a point on the line, say *A*, drawing an imaginary line to the pole of the circle marked with •. The point where this line intersects the circle, *A'*, is the image of *A*. All the different points of the infinite line will thus be mapped to different points on the finite circle and vice versa. The point at which the circle touches the line will be mapped to itself. The points close to it will be relatively exactly mapped on the lowest part of the circle. The further away from the circle the points lie on the line, the ‘denser’ will they be mapped to the points closer to the pole •.

The pole •, the ‘origin’ is, too, an image of something originating from the line. Of what? Of its infinity. Two lines are parallel if, being in the same plane, they do not intersect. Put in a somehow more abstract language: two lines (in the same plane) are parallel iff they intersect in infinity. The further from the circle we move, the closer to the ‘origin’ the images of the points will be; the line determining the image *B'* of *B*, as *B* moves toward infinity will be ‘more and more parallel’ to the bottom line. The two lines: the bottom one and the one parallel to it and touching the circle at its top pole, will intersect in infinity. The ‘origin’, reflecting the so called “point in infinity”, is thus the image of the infinity of the line on the finite (but unlimited) figure of the circle.<sup>269</sup>

2) represents (an early) stage of experience with *chaos* lying somewhere in-between 1) and 2), one could say, immediately after 1), when the circle is still very small.

The short dotted line corresponds to the level at which *actuality* is constituted as *distinguished* from *non-actuality*. 3) represents the stage of *reflective experience*. The circle became big enough to cross this line which now marks two spheres: what lies below it (e.g., *A'*) represents the *actual* and what lies above (like *B'*) the *non-actual*, and eventually the *non-actual*, aspects of *an experience*.

What lies on the circle ‘under’ the dotted line represents the *actuality* which we can also characterise as *simultaneity*. With respect to 2) this means that all the *distinctions*, all the images on the circle are simultaneous. Time has not begun to flow and all *distinctions* still coexist in a manner similar to the *chaotic co-presence*. At 3) the simultaneity becomes limited to the *actual* contents, to the *horizon of actuality*.

Imaging further ‘growth’ of the circle, we would soon reach the stage where the *actual* part is 168. almost negligibly small compared to the *non-actuality* above it.

We can also point out how the *origin* – the pole, and the *chaos* of *distinctions* – the ‘dense’ images of the remote points compressed close to the pole, withdraw during the ‘growth’ further and further away from the *actuality*: the *distance* between the two is marked by the growing

---

<sup>269</sup>“The soul is not a circle in the sense of the geometric figure but in that it at once contains the Primal Nature [as centre] and is contained by it [as circumference], that it owes its origin to such a centre and still more that the soul, uncontaminated, is a self-contained entity.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:9.8]

number of *distinctions* which separate them, the points on the circle between the dotted line of *actuality* and the pole •.

Finally, imagine the circle ‘moving’ along the bottom line. As the circle in 3) ‘moves’ to the right, the image  $B'$  of the point  $B$  will ‘slide down’ the circle – from its presence up there, close to the ‘origin’, and entering at some moment the *horizon of actuality*, when also the actual point  $B$  on the line gets close enough. (Eventually, if the circle stops at the point  $B$ , the two would coincide.) This could be taken as a picture of the process of *actualisation* which ‘pulls’ the vague, unclear image  $B'$  out of the compressed density close to the origin and isolates it in sharper and sharper form as it becomes *actual*.<sup>270</sup>

The *actual experience* is thus a juxtaposition of the *actual* contents of the line (close to, or under the circle, like  $A$  in 3) *and* the traces of these contents as they enter the sphere of *actuality* on the circle ‘from above’ ( $A'$  in 3). This goes equally well with the *Gestalt*-like psychology of perception, with the ‘filling in’ of the unperceived aspects by the ‘mind’, as well as with the deeper phenomena of *vague* anticipation and foreknowledge, things and events which are, consciously or subconsciously, anticipated and which are as much reflection of the approaching events as of the psychic and intellectual structure of the person who happens to be receptive to this kind of experiences. The *traces* are what connects the *actuality* with its non-*actual*, and ultimately non-*actual* and *invisible* roots.

169. Let us push this analogy just one step further. During a finite ‘life time’, the circle will traverse only a finite portion of the line. Traversal corresponds to gathering the *actual* experiences. Thus we mark two extreme points on the line  $L$  and  $R$  – the limits of the *actual* experiences the circle ever may have. The drawing 4) below illustrates the situation when the circle is on the  $L$  extreme – the image  $L'$  is on the edge of the *horizon of actuality*. (The dotted line of *actuality* is adequately lowered indicating the ‘growth’ of the circle.  $L'$  coincides now with the point of intersection of the circle and this line.) The points lying on the circle above it, that is between  $L'$  and the pole, will never enter the *horizon of actuality* (because the circle can move only to the right).



The point  $R'$  is the current image of the other extreme  $R$ . The points on the circle lying (clockwise) between  $L'$  and  $R'$  are those which never will be images of something within the *horizon of actuality* on the line – their pre-images lie either to the left of  $L$  or to the right of  $R$ . Now, as the circle moves towards this other extreme point  $R$ ,  $R'$  will ‘slide down’ reaching, eventually the edge of the *horizon of actuality* (symmetric to the current  $L'$ ), while  $L'$  will ‘slide upwards’ reaching the point opposite to the current  $R'$ . These two images, the current  $R'$  and the analogous position for  $L'$  obtained when the circle moves to the  $R$  extreme, induce the sphere which is marked with the dashed line. This sphere represents (relatively to the circle, not to its position on the line nor to the line itself) the part of the circle which never corresponds to any *actual experience*. It is the most condensed collection of the images originating beyond the limits of ever experienced *actualities* between  $L$  and  $R$ .

170. The *objectivistic illusion* ignores, if nothing else, at least this part. It bases its understanding exclusively on the fact that anything between  $L$  and  $R$  can be given in an *actual experience*. This is then extrapolated beyond these limits. Now, there need not be anything wrong with such an extrapolation. If this (or some other) circle moved beyond  $L$  or  $R$ , it would encounter new *actualities*. But the inexcusable mistake lies in ignoring the ever present sphere of the essential *non-actuality* (above the dashed line), if not also of the *non-actuality* which is closer to the *actual*

<sup>270</sup>Of course, technically, the image  $B'$  is equally “clear”, no matter how close to the pole it is. By “vagueness” here we should understand the density of the images which are closer to the pole (“what is closer to the one, is lesser with respect to quantity” [Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §179]), as opposed to their ‘more adequate’ representations, the closer they are to the point where the circle touches the line.

experience, but still not an *actual* part of it (on the drawing, the points of the circle between the dotted line of *actuality* and the dashed line going through  $R'$ ).

As we travel by car, or even better by carriage, the speed with which various objects pass by is inversely proportional to our distance from them: the close ones pass by very quickly, those which are not so close much slower, and those which are so far away as to be almost indiscernible seem also to become practically motionless. New impressions and things emerge from beyond the horizon but what remains constant and unchangeable through the whole journey is, if nothing else, the simple fact of this inverse proportionality *as well as* the very presence of the horizon. To claim that beyond the horizon there are things passing by as quickly as those closest to us is right only if one has already placed oneself there. Such a placement, however, is a displacement – it falsifies the very character of the experience which is always accompanied by the immovable horizon.

The illusion pretends that there is no horizon. It attempts to grow the circle to infinity in which case, in a truly Cusanus-like, unimaginable fashion, the circle would become the line itself, coinciding with it at every point, comprising everything within the *horizon of actuality*. (Do not even ask what would happen with the pole and ‘all the rest’ of the circle.) We need not say that such an operation not only does not help to understand the finitude of the circle – it also creates a confused mixture of this finitude and the infinity of the line, completely obliterating their respective character and, consequently, their mutual relations.

#### 6.4.2. What makes One differentiate?

“[I]f we follow the theologians who generate the world from night, or the natural philosophers who say that ‘all things were together’, the [same] impossible result ensues. For how will there be movement, if there is no *actually existing cause*? Wood will surely not move itself – the carpenter’s art must act on it; nor will the menstrual blood nor the earth set themselves in motion, but the seeds must act on the earth and the semen on the menstrual blood.”<sup>271</sup> The ‘analogical modeling’ – a typical example of *objectivistic illusion* – is transparent here. If one posits one as some ‘one’ different from ‘another’, as a ‘being’ among ‘beings’ only raised (in some strange way) above the differentiation – the question, implying an irresolvable antinomy, makes no sense. But one is nothing of this sort; the figure in the previous section should also illustrate the inadequacy of the question. Nothing makes one differentiate, because one is the for ever undifferentiated, the *indistinct*. The answer to the question “Why has the Primal not remained self-gathered so that there be none of this profusion of the manifold which we observe in existence and yet are compelled to trace to that absolute unity?”<sup>272</sup> is thus simply: it *has remained* so self-gathered. Yet, it is the origin of all the *distinctions*, so one may still wonder.<sup>273</sup> Let us therefore reiterate a few points related to this question, which will also clarify our debts to neo-Platonism and evolutionism.

##### 6.4.2.i. Virtual co-presence

Our starting point is not one ‘in itself’ – it is *birth*, the primordial confrontation of existence and one. The precedence of levels concerns the relation of *founding*: indeed, an ontological relation, but not in the sense of the *founding* element having existence before and independent from the *founded* ones, but only in the sense of not being relative to the *distinctions* of and between these lower, *founded* elements.

In so far as we can legitimately speak about the one, it is not the one ‘in itself’ (nor ‘for itself’), but only its presence, that is, its *transcendence confronting existence*.<sup>274</sup> It is a pure virtuality, a

<sup>271</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. XII:6 [my emph.]

<sup>272</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:1.6

<sup>273</sup> Plotinus’ answer concerning how the One engenders the first hypostasis, the Intellectual-Principle (or intellect), culminates in the passage: “Simply by the fact that in its self-quest it has vision: this very seeing is the Intellectual-Principle.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:1.7] Unfortunately, scholars can not figure out and agree whether “its” refers to the One or to the Intellectual-Principle which would make rather quite a bit of a difference. (A good account of interpretations and positions is given in C. D’Ancona, *Traditions of Platonism*.) We will continue with only loose Plotinian associations.

<sup>274</sup> Only in this sense the double meaning of the Greek *arche* applies to one: it is the ‘origin’ from which everything emerged *and* the ‘principle’ governing all, not in any specific sense but merely as the constant and always the same presence surrounding every actuality.

background behind the *chaos* – it has no presence except through differentiation, staying always above it. Although it is the first, it is inseparable from the second; although it is one, it emerges only through the *chaos* of many. The unchangeable, eternal Platonic Being is not the opposite of temporality, becoming and impermanence; the two do not constitute disjoint and completely dissociated ontological spheres – they are only the two extremes of the continuous line stretching from the origin to every, most minute *immediacy*, the extremes between which existence unfolds. We should never dissociate virtual elements (whether aspects of one *nexus* or levels of one *trace*) and consider them ‘in themselves’, as separate entities. They have meaning only in connection with each other, only when seen in the unity of the process in which they are involved. “Here conspires with There and There with Here [...] And since the higher exists, there must be the lower as well. The Universe is a thing of variety, and how could there be an inferior without a superior or a superior without an inferior? We cannot complain about the lower in the higher; rather, we must be grateful to the higher for giving something of itself to the lower.”<sup>275</sup>

Forgetting this *virtuality*, one quickly gets involved into antinomies of the kind: if the *one* is really ‘one’, then there is nothing which can affect its differentiation; but if there is something which can do that, than it cannot be the *one* itself, and so the *one* is not ‘one’. This is precisely the form of antinomy we have seen in 5.2.3. The question assumes the differentiated world of things, concepts, principles, reasons and, at the same time, posits the *one*, or rather ‘one’. And then it tries to apply the reflective categories of the differentiation back to their origin, as if one was ‘one’, a dissociated object which, analytically, means one among many. “You cannot take reality to pieces and then see how once more it can be combined to make reality.”<sup>276</sup>

But, of course, the *one* is not ‘one’. *Birth* is creation, not only of the *born* existence but also of the world, or of the *nexus* of the world. In these antinomous terms, the *one* might be taken as the state of *this* being and its world before it was *born*. But we do not want to multiply unnecessary antinomies. One is the *transcendent* pole of the event of *birth*. It is the *existence* which differentiates. And the more it does so, the more relative the *distinctions* are to this *existence* – differentiation is the expression of the sensuous mechanism, nervous system, needs, abilities, life style, *reflections*, etc. of this being. The world created with the *birth* of an ant is different from the world created with the *birth* of a human being. Even worlds created with *births* of different human beings are different.

The *birth*, the separation from the *one*, is the very individuality, *haecceitas* of the *existence*. The rest is the differentiation of life – if you want, development of the embryo.

172. This probably does not sound like a satisfactory metaphysical principle. But we are not trying to construct abstract metaphysics. We are interested in philosophical anthropology for which the starting point can only be the concreteness and uniqueness of human existence. The ultimate *nexus* of *birth* is reflected in the archetype of a seed or egg, like that which, according to Aristophanes, Nyx (Night) laid in Erebus (the Darkness of the Underworld) and from which, in due time, Eros (according to some versions, the very first of gods) was born; or else like that which, according to Basilides’ gnosis, was deposited by God before generating a series of beings and eventually the visible universe, which as “a germ, pregnant with hot and cold, separated itself off from the eternal, whereupon out of this germ a sphere of fire grew...”<sup>277</sup>

If one definitely wanted to insist on a metaphysical ‘principle’ of differentiation, then let us use a more modern image: Bergson’s abstraction of *elan vital* – the driving force of creative differentiation. We could say that *one* is the name (as good as *nothingness* or *Being*) given to the initial virtuality of life, and “Whatever the nature of matter, it may be said that life will at once establish in it a primary discontinuity, expressing the duality of need and of that which must satisfy it.”<sup>278</sup> Life will at once establish *distinctions*, life is the force of distinguishing. The first primitive would then be, instead of the *one*, the ‘force of differentiation’.<sup>279</sup> But this force has to

<sup>275</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. III:3.6-7

<sup>276</sup> F. H. Bradley, *On truth and copying*. p.38

<sup>277</sup> Anaximander DK 12A10

<sup>278</sup> H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*. p.198

<sup>279</sup> This will be different from Heraclitean *pyr aeizoon* if the latter is taken as a principle of mere strife between *distinctions*. However, following Philo, one can easily attempt an interpretation according to which the *arche* of fire is the very force of differentiation, the one which is many: “This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made. But it always was, is, and will be: an ever-living Fire (*pyr aeizoon*), with measures of it kindling, and measures going out. – Men do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself...” [Heraclitus DK 22B30-B51] Then, the war of opposites is only ‘father of all, king of all’ [DK 22B53], i.e., precedes the world

start somewhere, so take also the ‘pure virtuality’ (which, to begin with, should be the same as the force itself). In principle, we won’t object.<sup>280</sup> The *one* is not a dead, frozen ‘one’ which needs an external force to breath life into it, to turn it into ‘many’; it is not a ‘potentiality’ of formless matter which needs additional forms and all kinds of causes or motions to join them and turn into *actuality*. The *one*, as *indistinct*, is *pure virtuality* of possible *distinctions*. In particular, although it can be posited by *reflection* as a kind of ‘object’, it is present *only* through differentiation which is an inseparable part of *existential confrontation* with *one*. This differentiation establishes, however, another level of Being, leaving *one* untouched and inaccessible. The *one* “rests by changing.”<sup>281</sup> One taken as a metaphysical (meta)principle would thus be the force of ‘bearing’ existences – with both connotations of giving birth and support. All the rest of the process of differentiation is relative to such events of *confrontation*.

#### 6.4.2.ii. Birth as mystery vs. birth in time

Now, since *birth* is our starting point then, as the first moment of creation, it must remain a 173. mystery. And so it does. But this is a mystification! We know perfectly well what birth is and how it finds place in the course of the world, of the objective world. Why would one try to obscure such a common event?

Speaking (and thinking) *objectively*, you, like everybody else, are just an accident of the world, of the *objective* world... Indeed, but this is as true as it is uninteresting, or let’s only say, existentially irrelevant. You are an element of the *objective* world but only in so far as you view yourself as an *object*. This ‘object’ seems so unclear, indeterminate and undefinable, that one hardly needs arguments against such a reduction. Our exposition in this Book amounts also to the claim that it is just that: a reduction. From such an *objectivistic* perspective one can then learn nothing about oneself – at best, only something about one’s *objective* aspects. Looking all the time for the ultimate atoms which would explain everything, it only finds ever new ‘whats’ and suspects, if not knows perfectly well, the partiality and insufficiency of constructions starting from them. The explanations never reach any bottom, remain always conditioned by ‘something more’ which, although still hiding, is just around the corner and once unveiled, will yield the ultimate sufficient reasons and efficient causes. Thus science with its explanations (and every explanation is a reduction), risen to the ideology of ‘*objectivism*’, remains a perpetual project, striving after some regulative idea which, if reached would in some inexplicable manner explain everything but which also everybody knows is impossible. With respect to the meaningful things of existential importance, ‘*objectivism*’ either ignores them or keeps promising future answers, without ever having anything to offer.<sup>282</sup>

Let us emphasize: *objective* thinking has its irreplaceable and all important role in the project 174. of control, in the project of reflectively arranging the *dissociated* pieces into agreeable and useful complexes. We object only to the *objectivistic illusion* which claims absolute validity of *objectivity*. For all constructions bottom-up must start from some ‘given’ bottom, from the ever evading ‘atoms’. What such ‘atoms’ are and what counts as such ‘atoms’, is always a result of experience and *reflective dissociation* of experience. They have to be discovered before they can be used and, moreover, everybody has to discover them anew – in the course of his experience. *Objectivity* itself must be discovered which means, must be encountered in the experience of *objectivity*. But no matter ‘what’ appears, at a given moment, as the ultimate pieces of the *objective* world, it turns sooner or later into relative elements of more general understanding or deeper assumptions, that is, into something unpleasantly *subjective*. For what we can do with the ultimate *that* is either take it for what it is or project on it relative ‘whats’.

---

and is “the same for all”. Following the lines of such an interpretation, would probably eliminate most significant differences.

<sup>280</sup>Bergson intended such an interpretation of Plotinus which, more recently, has been expounded, e.g., in E. D. Perl, *The One as pure giving in Plotinus*.

<sup>281</sup>Heraclitus DK 22B84

<sup>282</sup>The projects and promises are as old as reductionism and all its forms could be quoted as examples – starting perhaps with some philosophers of nature from Miletus, then Democritus’ atomism, through most forms of empiricism, and then, after Descartes, all forms of scientism, with instances like Laplacean dismissal of the unnecessary hypothesis, later Skinner’s behaviorism, early champions of AI and the very idea of Turing test, Wilson’s biological reductionism, etc., etc. All instances when science becomes scientism can and will serve as examples.

We claim truth of some theories and untruth of others, we discover mechanisms of the world and history which were active long before our birth and will continue long after our death. They are all, hopefully, true but to be discovered, experienced *as true* something more is needed. Namely, the basic idea of truth, not of any conditions or ways of ascertaining it, but of its very sense. The basic idea of ‘being there’, not of something being there, not of any ‘what’ but simply – *that*. We can populate the world ‘beyond’ our experience with people and events, only because we have such a ‘beyond’, that is, only because we know *that*; only because ‘reality’, ‘objectivity’, call it as you like, is given in advance, as the very first condition and fact of existence and experience. It does not follow from any experience, not to mention, from any experiences. It is a mere *that* which does not arise from any ‘whats’ which are discovered already in experience and are relative to it. So, in a good, Kantian fashion – it is *a priori*. Unprovability *and* certainty constitute together a good sign of *a priori* as does, more generally, irreducibility to the merely *actual* categories.<sup>283</sup>

In short, the projects of elimination of existence, and of our existence in particular, from the ultimate (absolute and not relative) explanation of the totality of the world can arrive only at the *indistinct that*, that is, at no explanation at all. Every explanation is relative, and hence also partial, which, however, does not deprive it of value and objectivity. But absolutised ‘objectivism’ ends up as a projection of a solipsistic ‘subjectivity’, whether the latter takes the form of some transcendental ‘constitutions’ or of atomic ‘sensations’ and ‘ideas’.

175. This, however, is still only a mystification. ‘Objectivity’ is not experience of *objectivity* and ‘objective’ time is not experience of *objective* time. There is always the problem: the genesis of (the experience of) time involves and presupposes the temporal genesis, the genesis *in time*. If the discovered world and time are ‘objective’, this means exactly that they are present independently of this very discovery. This crux of the matter is impossible to ignore, and we are far from doing that. We have explained in 4.3.3 that our experience of time, like all our experience, amounts to a discovery, not to a constitution, let alone ‘subjective’ experience and projection. “Man learns the concept of the past by remembering.”<sup>284</sup> Saying no more is to remain in the grips of empiricism. For, if there were no past to learn, learning its concept would amount to an empty game. The concept of the past as well as the objective past do arise through *actual experiences* and *reflection*. But they do no more than, first, *reflect* the experience and, eventually, *confrontation* with the ultimate ‘objectivity’ and *transcendence* of the one. This accounts for the natural interweaving of one’s experience of time with the *objective* time, of one’s experience of the world with the *objective* world. The former does not represent the latter in some ‘internal duplication’, it only distinguishes it and thus enters it, weaves itself into it.

Every birth is also an *objective* event, the mystery of the beginning finds place in the time we understand as *objective*. But the fact that the ontological event coincides with the *actual* one does not mean that we should confuse its ontological character with its *objective* form. The fact that the order of ontological *founding* happens to coincide (in so far as we are concerned) with the order of temporal succession does not mean that they are one and the same. The former has an *absolute* beginning, while search for the beginning of the latter (with the associated antinomies) continues since ... the beginning of time.

We certainly do not want to oppose the attempts to understand *objective* processes of *actual* things and relations between them. We only claim that such attempts will never even touch the fringe of *concreteness* which surrounds every *actual* experience and every abstract conception. The value of such attempts is as praiseworthy as their absolutisation is regrettable – they are, after all, complete opposites of the *absolute*. An *existence* arises from the ultimate objectivity of *nothingness* and it arises in the process of differentiation. This process can be viewed from ‘inside’ (as we are trying to do) or from ‘outside’, in terms of ‘*objective* givens’. The latter view always has to re-construct the primordial *unity* from its ‘givens’ which, however, themselves are relative to the prior differentiation. Consequently, ‘how’ this process proceeds in the *objective* time and ‘what’ are its *objective* elements are questions involved already into relativity to the inquiring *existence*, to the context of inquiry, to the level of objective knowledge, to the historical and cultural situation. If one finds in such a relativity reasons for universal scepticism or historical relativism, it is only because ‘objectivism’ itself is only matter of faith. And we would say, of bad

---

<sup>283</sup>Of course, we do not share Kant’s concept of *a priori* which, according to phenomenological understanding, is not given independently from experience (there is no *such* thing), but is experienced, if not given, in any experience.

<sup>284</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. II:xiii

faith, because its lack of ultimate reason and justification rests on the constant absolutisation of the current results of relative *distinctions*, on claiming the status of *absolute that* to the relative ‘whats’, in short, on the *objectivistic illusion*.

#### 6.4.2.iii. Creation, emanation, evolution

We obviously owe quite a lot to neo-Platonism. At the same time, we seem to mix it with other elements (creationism, evolutionism) which are typically considered as its contraries. Let us therefore comment these aspects.

##### *Creation vs. emanation*

176.

Birth establishes existence as the confrontation with one, the (force of) differentiation of the *indistinct*. We called it “*creatio ex nihilo*” but we also used the language of neo-Platonism, identifying this creation with the gradual hypostases emanating from the *one*. This might easily appear as an unjustifiable conflation of the two ideas which exclude, even contradict, each other. For either the world is created from nothing, created by a free act of God’s will, or else it emanates by necessity, and hence in all eternity, from some archetypal principle, from the unity of the First.<sup>285</sup>

Indeed, it is easy to construct incongruent, even contradictory, images. On the one hand, God – no matter what one says, imagined as an external agent, sitting there and waiting for the moment when his freedom makes Him say “*Fiat!*”. And, *voilà*, here comes the world – but in fact, just a new object (or totality thereof) created by an agent, just like a house is ‘created’ by the construction workers. On the other hand, One – no matter what one says, imagined either as a dead object, lying there and waiting for being given life from outside, or else as a uniform and undifferentiated *being* – yes! an object again – which somehow externalises its hypostases, throws them out of itself; moreover, since it contains the principle of the emanation within itself, it can not do anything else, it emanates all hypostases with eternal necessity.

Both pictures are equally childish, yet it is easier to state than to help. It is these pictures which make one consider the two, creation and emanation, contradictory. But one is *nothing* and *nothing* is *one*, 6.3, §§148.ff, and so creation from *nothingness* is the same as emergence from the *one*. *One* is not any agent with will and other faculties similar to ours – speaking about His free will is indeed funny anthropomorphism. An individual existence is created – *born* – directly, as it is determined exclusively by the confrontation with the *one*. This aspect of creation remains a mystery as far as its reason and first stages are concerned. “How?”, “why?”, even “what?” are inadequate questions, because when there are only *pure distinctions*, or perhaps even only the mere fact of confrontation, there are no grounds for answering them. Every attempted answer will be only a reduction to some ‘whats’ assumed more primordial. We start with *birth*, the *absolute beginning* and do not attempt to give an account of its reasons – whether one calls them “God’s free act” or “One’s generous goodness” makes no difference: both are equally inadequate. Finally, the *origin* does not remain ‘outside’ the emerging world but in its midst, the presence of *one*, as the *indistinctness* surrounding eventually every situation, penetrates the whole creation. “Emanation” emphasizes the aspect of *immanence*, while “creation” that of *transcendence* of the *origin* in relation to the differentiated and, eventually, visible world.

##### *Neo-Platonism vs. evolutionism*

177.

Evolutionism is easily considered the successor of neo-Platonism, almost as if it were its scientific improvement which deservedly replaced the hapless and unenlightened ancestor. In fact, while the differences may appear contrary, there are also apparent similarities which justify the

<sup>285</sup> Interpretation of Genesis as *creatio ex nihilo* was suggested to Christians by Galen, who criticised their capricious God creating in a completely arbitrary manner. For Moses “it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was presently arranged in due order; for he believes everything to be possible with God [...] We, however, do not hold this[...]” [Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*. XI:14] Gnostic theologian Basilides seems to have been the first Christian thinker to articulate the rudiments of the doctrine (second quarter of the 2-nd century), followed shortly by more definite formulations of Theophilus, the bishop of Antioch [after G. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts...*]. Christian thinkers of neo-Platonic orientation did not make much out of the claimed contradiction. The idea of emanations was forcefully opposed by Aquinas and then Ockham, both emphasizing the *ex nihilo* aspect as well as the fact that God creates every individual being directly, and not by any gradual individuation of some universal essence. We can easily agree with this critique when restricted to individual existences. With respect to particular things, it is a different matter which has been presented so far and will be addressed further in Book II.

sense of continuity between the two. Our middle ground differs, being a middle ground, slightly from both. Let us therefore indicate briefly the respective relations.

There are many passages in neo-Platonic texts suggesting that emanations are not mere reflections but genuine differentiations, that the emerging entities are truly different from their origin.<sup>286</sup> Yet, the accepted interpretation, as well as many other fragments, suggest that “emanations proceed through similarity.”<sup>287</sup> This aspect may be particularly prominent in Proclus’ dry conceptualism, but the principle of *chorismos* (reflection as likeness of the original) is quite central in Plotinus.<sup>288</sup>

Our ‘emanations’ proceed by *distinction* and even *dissociation*. Even if “[e]verything that is in another emerges *exclusively* from that other,”<sup>289</sup> then it is also the case that the emerging entity, the emerging aspects introduce entirely new elements not present originally. The process of differentiation is a gradual *actualisation* of virtual nexuses – its result is *founded* in the *nexus* but not determined uniquely by it. The result need not be – in fact, never is – in any way similar to its ‘cause’, to the *nexus* from which it emerged. The former is not an image of the latter but its *sign*, it does not have to resemble the latter but only point to it. The dependence on the origin is neither conceptual (similarity) nor causal but evolutionary, where everything “unfolds from some concentrated central principle as from a seed.”

Although the relation of similarity is not transitive, using it as the principle of emanation poses the question about *how far* the succeeding stages should resemble each other, exactly *how* similar the image should be to its prior and, in particular, to its immediate predecessor. This principle carries the primary responsibility for the neo-Platonic multiplications of the intermediary stages almost *ad infinitum*. Plotinus’ disciple Amelius distinguishes three additional hypostases of the Intellect; Iamblichus adds yet another One above the One of Plotinus, some additional intellectual principles or demiurges, supra-terrestrial and other souls; Proclus, arranging the hypostases into triads, brings in some order but the number of levels of beings hardly diminishes; the gnostic cosmogonies and ontologies inherit this disease and, even more than the late neo-Platonic hierarchies, slip out of control enmeshing the student into the intricacies of ever longer and longer series of spiritual beings which follow each other according to the similarities and oppositions as fantastic as they are unbearable. Our levels, the steps in the process of *actualisation*, could also be multiplied *ad infinitum*. The reason is simply the continuity of the process as opposed to the discrete structure of its conceptual representation; or put differently: the *unity* of existence as opposed to its *reflective* account.<sup>290</sup> One might be tempted to excuse the principle of similarity for the multiplication of the hypostases as being if not a perfect image, so at least a vague reflection of this very continuity.

The kind of development, however, is different. The lower levels in our process of differentiation are not, as in neo-Platonism, inferior to the higher ones. As they are not mutually similar, they are not to be compared either. The lower levels constitute truly new dimensions of Being, just like new evolutionary stages go beyond the previous ones. The “higher” and “lower” do not refer to any valuations but simply to the precedence in the order of *founding*. The *founding* itself is also different from – and much weaker than – the relation of being generated, of reflecting, of necessarily emanating, or almost whatever interpretation one might assign to the neo-Platonic relation between the lower and the higher. The lower levels are, indeed, dependent on the higher ones but only in the sense of the latter being their necessary conditions. A *dissociated* (or only

---

<sup>286</sup> Plotinus uses the analogy of a seed: everything “must unfold from some concentrated central principle as from a seed, and so advance to its term in the varied forms of sense. The prior in its being will remain unalterably in the native seat;” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. IV:8.6] and the element of differentiation is, of course, always there: “Every thing which participates of The One, is both one and not one.” [Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §2]

<sup>287</sup> Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §166 [Likewise, in §18: “Everything that by its existence benefits others, is in itself originally that which it bestows upon the recipients.”]

<sup>288</sup> E.g., discussing time and eternity, Plotinus says: “We begin with Eternity, since when the standing Exemplar is known, its representation in image – which Time is understood to be – will be clearly apprehended [...]” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. III:7.1] Generally, “in things of sense the Idea is but an image of the authentic, and every Idea thus derivative and exiled traces back to that original and is no more than an image of it.” [Ibid. V:9.5] There is certainly space for discussion whether apprehension of the image through the knowledge of the exemplar implies for Plotinus similarity in any trivial sense, but we leave this to the scholars. In J. H. Fielder, *Chorismos and Emanation*, likeness is listed as one of the four aspects of the Plotinian image (the other three being distinctness from, inferiority to and dependency on the original).

<sup>289</sup> Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §41 [my emph.]

<sup>290</sup> Hopefully, the way we have structured these stages does not appear completely arbitrary. It will be further justified in the following Book.

distinguished) aspect depends on the *nexus* from which it is thus distinguished (just like a *sign* or a *trace* depends on that of *which* it is a *sign/trace*) but the *nexus* itself is not its efficient or other cause. There is no causal or direct generative relation, the lower is not determined by the higher, nor follows from it by any necessity.

Another important difference concerns the understanding of individuality. The soul, according to Plotinus, is divine, by its power “the manifold and diverse heavenly system is a unit; through soul this universe is a God”. Yet soul “for all the worth we have shown to belong to it, is yet a secondary, an image of the Intellectual-Principle.”<sup>291</sup> And the soul treated here is not yet the individual soul of the individual human but the comprehensive soul-principle from which individual souls emanate in further stages. With us individuation happens not by descent and joining the matter, but is the first event of birth: *haecceitas* is not at the lowest level of Being but in its center, preceding all *distinctions* of substances, attributes, causes and effects. A unique individuality of existence is the beginning and not only the final result of a gradual differentiation and eventual enmatteringment.

Neo-Platonism has been taken as the abstract metaphysics of the objective world, supposedly *explaining* the emergence of souls, people, particular things in the process of objective generation. Although such an interpretation might perhaps be defended, we do not find it plausible to dwell on such literal images.<sup>292</sup> In our case, the separation of concerns should be completely unambiguous – we are doing philosophical anthropology, not any abstract metaphysics, not any objective theory of everything. In this respect we believe to be in full agreement with neo-Platonism and only want to distance ourselves from its objectivistic (mis)interpretations. Treated as such a ‘theory of the objective world’, neo-Platonism has been replaced by evolutionism. Although such a replacement witnesses to a misunderstanding, it offers also conceptual tools of reinterpretation which, so it seems, we have been utilising. Let us, therefore, comment now briefly on this aspect.

Just like ontogenesis repeats phylogenesis so here, every *actuality* repeats the levels of its development, repeats this development in the structure of layers surrounding it in its very *actuality*. In this way, the dynamic element of evolutionism present in our development is fully compatible with the static universe of neo-Platonic inspiration. ‘Evolution’ (let us use temporarily this designation for our *actualisation*) does not simply leave the past stages behind, transforming the less advanced forms into the more advanced ones. In the process of temporal development, the primordial – and higher – remains completely unaffected, it is not replaced by, but remains around and underneath the lower. Unlike in the evolutionary process, here the source is preserved and remains untouched, §165.

Just like the lower is not any debasement of the higher, so the ‘later’ is not any improvement of the ‘earlier’. The ‘evolution’ is indeed differentiation but this seems the only ground for comparison of various levels. More importantly, what completely distinguishes our ‘evolution’ from evolution is the fact that the lower (‘later’) aspects may in fact influence the higher (‘earlier’) ones. The higher does represent an ‘overflow’, though not in the productive sense as often used by Plotinus, but only in the sense of inexhaustibility by the lower, of being *transcendent* in relation to and inaccessible by the lower. The inaccessibility concerns however only the lower restricted and completely enclosed within its own categories. For instance, using and focusing exclusively on the categories of *reflective dissociation*, one will never reach any genuine experience. But as one is more than the *reflective actuality*, as one is the *unity* of the whole *existence*, so the events of the lower and more *actual* order may influence the higher levels. We leave these remarks for the time

<sup>291</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:1.2-3

<sup>292</sup> Such an objectivistic interpretation can be seen in a close association with magic and spiritualism which infected Plotinus’ mysticism almost immediately. While Plotinus lived, “he lifted his pupils with him. But with his death the fog began to close in again, and later neo-Platonism is in many respects a retrogression to the spineless syncretism from which he had tried to escape.” [E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Appendix II:2] Porphyry, Proclus, Iamblichus not only commented extensively on the theurgic ground work, Julianus’ *Chaldean Oracles*, but mixed religious devotion both with magic statuettes and oracular images (their power resulted from the natural sympathy linking image with original) but also with conjuring spirits and gods in mediumistic seances which would be hard to distinguish from the practices of modern spiritualists. This tradition becomes reinforced in the neo-Platonism of the Renaissance which, joining it with the newly imported Cabala, tried to apply the system to magical purposes. Such applications seemed possible because the natural world was seen as literally dependent on (generated from and subordinated to) the celestial and then supra-celestial one. The whole hierarchy turned thus – in the hands of Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Cornelius Agrippa, John Dee and many others – into a system of objectified, because usable, entities, whether angels which could be conjured, or letters and symbols which could be manipulated according to the numerological formulae. (F. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* provides a good, general overview.)

being, because the mechanisms of such an influence will be discussed in more detail in Book II (2.2.3.i and 2.3) and in Book III.

The above two points – that ‘earlier’ stages get accumulated and remain *present*, and that the ‘later’ ones can influence them – lead to the final point of difference. Unlike evolution – and similarly to neo-Platonism – our process leaves open the possibility of a kind of return. “Whence things have their origin, Thence also their destruction happens.”<sup>293</sup> The eventual return to *indistinctness* – death – will not concern us much, but much of Book II will be concerned with the relations between the *actual reflection* and the higher levels which, in some sense, might be called “return to the origin”.

180. In short, we have adjusted neo-Platonism and evolutionism by restricting both to the development of a human individual. This is development of a *unity*, of a unique *existence*, which does not appeal to any externally differentiated environment but, to use such a language, is only the development of this very environment. There is no essential gap between *existence* and the world because this world emerges only with the *existence*, because it is the world of *distinctions* which this *existence* is able to *recognise* (not only ‘understand’, not only *erkennen* in any narrow sense of this word). The *objectivistic* assumption that every particular *act* is an event involving some ready-made entities, *dissociated* more or less *precisely* from each other, not only makes any meeting impossible but also tries to begin with something which is only the end of the fundamental process. The evolutionary aspect is present in the creative differentiation of the *indistinct* through the subsequent *nexus* and *dissociations*. But it is neither any mechanic development in which a system passes through stages with different contents but the same form, nor any *objectivistic* evolution which forgets the previous stage as soon as it reaches the next one. The ‘past’ stages are preserved as the deeper aspects underlying the ‘subsequent’ ones, and this conservative aspect of the process distinguishes it from evolutionism and brings closer to neo-Platonism.

---

<sup>293</sup>Anaximander DK 12B1

“[...] being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.  
[...] the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen  
was not made out of what was visible.”

Heb. XI:1-3

## Book II (of curiosity)

# Between Heaven and Earth

We have followed the order of ontological *founding*, of gradual *actualisation* of the *original virtuality*, of gradual differentiation of the *indistinct*, in short, of something emerging out of *nothing*. We have thus arrived at the level of reflective experiences, of the *dissociated objects* appearing within the familiar circle of the *horizon of actuality*.

But familiarity and secure surroundings breed quickly, if not boredom, so some restlessness, a thirst for a challenge of the unexpected, perhaps even for a meeting with the eldritch and uncanny. We will now reverse the direction and consider the ways in which the ontological hierarchy is reflected in experience or, what amounts to the same, how *reflection* may organise the world. We will thus proceed with the categories of *reflection*, with some limits of *distinctions*, and move in the direction opposite to the order of ontological *founding*. Although “the way up and the way down is one and the same,”<sup>1</sup> it looks and feels very different when walked up and down. We will follow the realistic (in the sense of I:5.2.4) way bottom-up, but will also keep in mind the constant presence of all higher and earlier hypostases in every *actual experience*.

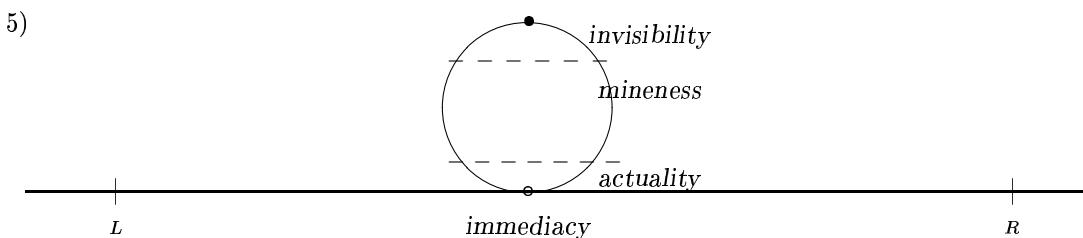
### 1 The existential levels

“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on earth,  
and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels  
of God ascending and descending on it.”

Gen.

XXVIII:12

As the earlier hypostases gather underneath the differentiated contents of *actual experiences* and permeat them with the *invisible rest*, they are also experienced – not as *actual objects* but as layers which surround any such *object*, as aspects of any *actual experience*. We can roughly distinguish the levels of *any experience*: **1. immediacy** is like the ideal limit of *spatio-temporality*, impossible and unavoidable companion of *reflection*; **2. actuality** is determined by the contents within its *horizon*; **3. the level of mineness** encircles the limits of *my world* and *my whole life*, contributing the personal aspect to every *actual experience*; **4. invisibility** are the ever *present aspects* which never enter the *horizon of actuality*. Augmenting figure 4) from I:§169, we can mark schematically the levels as indicated below:



*An actual experience* involves all the levels and does not consist of some ‘four parts’. (Imagining the circle moving along the line, only the actual content but not the levels become affected by its actual position.) We can nevertheless, and consciousness typically does, view it from a limited perspective of a single level, that is, within a definite temporal scope which determines the context

---

<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus DK 22B60

of reference and the character of the relevant contents. Each level is a *nexus* of various aspects (in fact, traces of the *original separation*), among which we will address the following:

1. the character of the *signs*, or the way of *actual* appearance, specific for the contents of a given level;
2. the correlate of the experience – its ‘objective pole’, the character of its contents;
3. the character of the ‘subjective pole’

(These last two points only at the lowest level approach the usual *dissociation of object and subject*; they could be better called “origin” and “reflection”, if we have not reserved these words for other purposes.)

4. the form of *transcendence* pertaining to the contents of the given level; there are two different aspects which, together, constitute the character of *transcendence*:
  - (a) the *horizontal transcendence* of the correlate, of the ‘objective pole’ of an experience at a given level; as a variation of *horizontal transcendence*, one will usually consider the merely quantitative transcendence of other correlates with respect to the *actual* one
  - (b) the *vertical*, or qualitative *transcendence*, which contains the *non-actual* aspects of the experience at the current level, pointing toward the higher one.

In the *reflective* terms, the basic factor distinguishing the levels is the temporal scope of the involved experiences: from the ideal timeless point, pure *here-and-now* of a single *object*, through the finite and limited scope of their *actual complexes*, then the finite but unlimited time of one’s whole life, to the – again timeless, but now living – eternity, the immovable *presence* of the *origin*. Using this as the basis of distinction, let us nevertheless remember that these differences are only indications of the whole *nexus*es of *aspects* which distinguish various levels.

## 1.1 Immediacy

2. Let us try to imagine a shortest possible time span in which we can still experience, feel, sense – discern – something. The question is not about how long this time would be, but about what would remain as the possible experience. It might be, perhaps, a single sensation, a punctual, localised, feeling of pain, pricking, heat. It might be hearing a noise, a single sound, seeing a simple thing. It might be, perhaps, a single thought, an isolated image, appearing instantaneously in our imagination. It might also be all such aspects together in one moment. The problem is, of course, that although we have a sense of ‘one moment’, nobody has a slightest idea what it possibly might be. It seems to have some experiential basis but also, when reflected upon, it dissolves as the ideal limit of *immediacy*, the point of pure ‘now’. We would propose to call it “a shortest unit of experienced time” or, perhaps, “a shortest unit of time which can be referred to an experience”. We are not asking, as Locke did, if such a durational ‘specious present’, such *minima sensibilia*, can or can not be further divided into more minute and ‘objective’ *l’atome du temps* of Poincaré, ‘quanta of time’ of Whitehead or ‘chronons’ of some contemporary physicists – its ‘objective’ duration does not matter to us. This is the level of pure, ultimate *immediacy*. *Immediacy* is just that which is immediate, which has no time to be mediated. What is experienced *immediately* may vary, in particular, with the level of attention we pay to things but it will never last two hours, it will be always comprised in a tiny, not to say infinitesimal, instant of time, at the limit of *actuality*. We will devote a few paragraphs to its experiential basis but most of the section will be concerned with the status of the *reflectively posited*, ideal and infinitesimal limits.

### 1.1.1. The signs

#### 3. *Original signs*

The *sign*, the *original sign* of such an *immediate experience* is not announcing anything, or better, it is announcing itself and only itself. Whether it is ‘subjective’ or ‘objective’, whether it is sensed pain, heard noise, felt dread, perceived object, imagined thought, it is a *sign* which fully coincides with the signified. It has been *cut out* of the horizon of experience but attentive reflection has not yet had time to carry out its representing explication. When I get burned by a glowing spark thrown out from the fire, I do not experience a sensation *and* a spark, it is the

spark which hurts me, I might cry out “Ah, *it* burns!” ‘It’ is equally the spark and the place of my body where it burns.

We are not here after any phenomenological intentionality. On the contrary, within the temporal scope of *immediacy*, there is hardly any difference whether the *sign* has some ‘objective’ or else only ‘subjective’ correlate. The *sign* and what it possibly signifies may be, perhaps, distinguished by subsequent *reflection*, but they coincide in the *immediate experience*. There is no intentionality and the experience has the form of a pure ‘state’ with a definite quality (pain, warmth, meekness, etc.)

An *immediate sign* coincides also with the reaction, if any. Pain, like that caused by a burning spark, is *nothing else* than the *immediate withdrawal*, or attempt to withdraw, reaction of avoidance or defense which, typically, is taken care of by the autonomous part of the nervous system. Similarly, a pleasant sensation is nothing else than the response of my body to its attraction. (This may become *reflectively realised* first when the pleasant stimulus withdraws and I have to attempt to approach it, but originally, there is no distinction between the pleasant stimulus, its attractive force and the reaction of ‘approaching it’, ‘preserving it’.)<sup>4</sup>

Such reactions are reflexes, that is, elementary *reflections*, involving an extreme narrowing of the focus to this particular, isolated point. Bergson, identifying sensations with perceptions of one’s body, says it this way: “The psychical state, then, that I call “my present”, must be both a perception of immediate past and a determination of immediate future. Now, the immediate past, in so far as it is perceived, is, as we shall see, sensation,[...] and the immediate future, in so far as it is being determined, is action or movement.”<sup>2</sup> Re-action, this act or movement which follows within the *immediacy* of sensation, is what we call “reflex”. It involves both receptivity, the re-, in so far as it is triggered and not mediated, and also activity, the -action, in so far as it is actually doing something, performs some movement.

There is no subject of such an event. Sure, it is I who experience the pain, but in its *immediacy* it is not even relative to *my body*, but merely to a particular sense, particular organ, particular point of the body. Its minute localisation refers it to the reacting organ which, so to speak, only happens to be mine. The experience itself does not involve myself, only the affected place of my body. In fact, a more *reflective act* is needed to refer such *an experience* to a subject, to myself. As long as I do not perform it, I ‘drown’ in the *immediacy* of an experience and reflexes, which only *post factum* appear ‘as’ mine.

### **Reflective signs**

5.

Reflection happens always within the *horizon of actuality*, but it may bring within this horizon signs of different things. The question analogous to that asked in §2 would be now: what can reflection focus on in a ‘shortest possible moment’, or better, what kind of reflection would make its object, not only its *sign*, closest to itself? It would be directed toward some *actual object*, present here-and-now, not to ‘Prague’, ‘meaning of life’, ‘love’. And then, it would not be a reflection which contemplates how this *object* is, what it is like, etc. It would be a mere registration that, *that it is*.

One can sometimes experience the astonishing fact *that* this something in front of me *is*, that it at all *is*. Existentialists made such experiences into a nauseous feeling of unbearable, meaningless presence but it may also be quite a detached and full of gratitude realisation *that it is* while it might not be. The question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” may be given other connotations but it, too, expresses such a reflection, the amazement at the mere *fact* of this something being at all. The experience simply reveals object’s naked *actuality*, the mere fact that *it is* – fully *actual*, in front of me, ‘out there’.

This idea, underlying the whole ‘metaphysics of actuality’, has here its concrete, experienced form. *Reflection that it is* shares with the *original signs* the full consummation within the pure, experientially unextended *immediacy*. But as reflection it is, of course, already doubled. The *object* of such a reflection appears in total *dissociation*, the strangeness of its being at all is, in fact, the strangeness of its being here ‘on its own’, of its being so strangely alone against – and

---

<sup>2</sup>H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*. p.138. The immediate past and future, so aptly related here to receptivity and action, which Husserl turned into retentions and protensions, are results of analysis which has placed such an *immediate experience* in the idealised, objective time or, as Bergson would have it, of duration. But we do not intend to develop a theory of sensation and perception and will stay with the mere quality of ‘my present’, *immediate experience*.

before – the reflective act. Thus, the reflective sign does not any more coincide with its *object*. But reflection does not have time to reflect over the *distance* – it remains merely experienced and for reflection both its act and *object* appear as coinciding in the pure, infinitesimal limit of *immediacy*.

### 1.1.2. Substances, objects, particulars

6. An *object*, appearing in the *reflection that it is*, appears as a substance, to which belong “both separability and ‘thisness’”, as the “ultimate substratum, which is *no longer* predicated of anything else; but of which all else is predicated”<sup>3</sup>, “a complete indivisible being.”<sup>4</sup> A thing, a physical thing of daily experience is a paradigm of an *object*. And the word “*object*” is particularly significant for it brings a thing out of the context of such an *experience* and places it in the context of attentive *reflection that it is*. What it achieves, or in any case attempts, is reducing the object to a dimensionless residuum, emptying it of any specific content and merely suggesting its ‘being there’, pure ‘substantiality’ stripped of all ‘accidents’. It reduces the *actuality* of a thing to a mere indication of something definite (even if indefinable) and *cut out* from the surroundings, an independent ‘being there’. It reduces a thing to a point.

The intuitions of Leucippus and Democritus in this respect can hardly be overestimated. The Greek “*atomon*” means indivisible, and the speculative theory of atomism is the first tribute paid to the idealised notion of a ‘substance’. It captures the abstract idea of the least and eventual building blocks of the universe in a much clearer, if abstract, language than the elements inherited by the Milesians from Empedocles. But it is less satisfying to the empirically oriented mind and what follows, naturally, is the search for such points in experience. Whether these are identified with sensations, perceptions, clear and precise ideas, objective things, atoms, elementary particles, quarks or strings are secondary distinctions. They all move within the horizon of *immediacy* under the evanescent shadow of the ultimate simple, “that bounding point [which] indeed//Exists without all parts, a minimum//Of nature.”<sup>5</sup>

7. All the criteria for something being a ‘substance’ are gathered in, and sometimes follow from, this ideal limit of a pure point. But primarily they just reflect the characteristic features of a limit of *distinctions* solidified as a positive entity. We mention only a few examples.

The isolation of the *object*, its definite *dissociation* from the horizon of the surrounding *experience*, gives rise to the idea of its complete independence and self-sufficiency, its existence ‘on its own’. This independence is immediately given in the *reflection that it is*. It can be observed when we notice how a subjective feeling, say, a sensation, becomes independent in a similar way when it is posited as an *object*. An *immediate* sensation of pain gives the possible *reflection* a localised focus but it is still my sensation, it is still a sensation involved in the context in which it arises. As I *attentively dissociate* it from this context and *posit* it as an *object of reflection*, consider it ‘as it is in-itself’, in short, *externalise* it, it loses its concreteness and appears gradually as a more and more depersonalised *external* entity, whether an independent substance or an atomic impression.

A related aspect of sedimenting *dissociated distinctions* as a positive limit or, eventually, of positing an ideal point as a measure of reality, concerns temporality. On the one hand, point gains the place in the, by now objective, time as the ultimate ‘now’. An *object*, imagined if not intended, posited if not thought as a point becomes itself a timeless event, it resides in the purified ‘now’ which, by this reduction which is also abstraction, has become *dissociated* from time. A substance, abstracted in this way from time, appears (shall we say, necessarily?) as a solidified, unchangeable being. It appears so not by any analogy, not because it is permanent or because we have extrapolated to it observations of something relatively constant, but because it has been pulled out of time, confined to an ideal, timeless point of a pure ‘now’.

Another aspect of this timeless permanence, of the determinacy of isolated independence is the idea of perfectly clear, unambiguous presence (or absence) of the point, that is, of a perfectly clear and unambiguous knowledge. Idea of such a knowledge is, originally, with Aristotle or there

---

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. V:8; VII:3

<sup>4</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *Correspondence with Arnauld*. to Arnauld 28.11/8.12 1686. [In whole this section, we exclude living beings from our considerations. Likewise, here we have to exclude the specificity of Leibniz' notion of a substance which ends up with a monad (corresponding roughly to our *existence*). Here we are only concerned with the characteristics one was expecting substances to have.]

<sup>5</sup> T. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*. I:5

about, merely another side of the idea of a substance: well-defined, clearly cut out, independent and self-same entity. It would be pointless to follow the historical development of this idea, but we can remark that eventually, with the emergence of epistemology, with Berkeley or Descartes, it gives rise to the idea of knowledge coinciding with its *object* – no longer in the way intellectual realm of Plotinus or Scholastics contained eternal intellections being self-same with their objects, but just as in the *immediate experience* the *original sign* coincides with the signified. The hunt for the infallible, certain knowledge is a companion of the hunt for the ultimate atoms: both emerge from the idealisation of *immediate experiences*, from the narrowing of the *horizon of actuality* to the idealised, pure *immediacy* of a point.

Paradoxically, but also very naturally, a point *posited* as the residuum of *precision* and infallible knowledge is also the limit of any possible *distinctions*, that is, of comprehensibility. ‘In itself’ it is unknowable, not however because it hides the ultimate content from us but, on the contrary, because it does not hide anything which could be *distinguished*, and hence known. Thus, *positing* the points of the ultimate ‘substances’, one *posits* by the same token the unknowable ‘things in themselves’.<sup>8</sup>

Those pointing out how Aristotle’s thinking was determined by the structure of the Greek language and common sense, might certainly observe that the attempts to capture the idea of a substance end up with the attempts to define what, in the daily language, counts as things. And they end badly. That which “is first in every sense – in definition, in order of knowledge, in time”; that which can exist independently from all else; “that which is primarily, i.e. not in a qualified sense but without qualification”<sup>6</sup> – all that threatens with disappearance in nothingness. Already in the IV-th century St. Basil suggested: “Do not let us seek for any nature devoid of qualities by the conditions of its existence, but let us know that all the phenomena with which we see it clothed regard the conditions of its existence and complete its essence. Try to take away by reason each of the qualities it possesses, and you will arrive at nothing. Take away black, cold, weight, density, the qualities which concern taste, in one word all these which we see in it, and the substance vanishes.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, “there is no body of which I can say for certain that it is a substance rather than an aggregation of several substances, or perhaps a phenomenon.”<sup>8</sup> A particular can be analysed as consisting of other, more minute particulars as any *distinction* can be refined by more *distinctions*. What’s wrong with the famous heap of stones? What does it lack to be a respectable ‘substance’? Any inherent principle of organisation? A genuine unity? A substantial form? What does not lack all that? If it turns out that this very heap of stones was set up on purpose as a signpost, will it acquire some of these lacking aspects? And if not then, perhaps, when it turns out that not only it was not just a heap functioning as a signpost, but that its exact form and the number of stones had specific meaning?

*There are no such metaphysical entities as ‘substances’, ‘particular things’. A particular thing is a . . . cut from experience signified within the horizon of actuality.*<sup>9</sup>

A particular thing is a limit of *distinctions*, is a place at which the possible process of further *distinguishing* is terminated, or in any case, suspended.<sup>9</sup> Particular thing as a limit of *distinctions* – which is grasped or, in any case, signified within the *horizon of actuality* – can be equated with this thing being everything it is not, being the totality of *distinctions* which are excluded and left

---

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. VII:1

<sup>7</sup> St. Basil, *Nine Homilies of the Hexaemeron*. I:8

<sup>8</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *Correspondence with Arnauld*. to Arnauld, draft, 28.11/8.12 1686

<sup>9</sup> ‘Ultimate difference’ of Duns Scotus seems to carry the same intuition, even if richer associations. Although one might classify specific difference (constituting the being of a species) and even transcendental difference (contracting ‘Being’ to the ultimate genera or categories) as instances of ‘ultimate difference’, eventually, it amounts to the *haecceitas*, the individuating being and, in fact, to the mere indication of ‘a being’, ‘a thing’. Of course, within the mind-things dualism, it has never been clear whether such differences are external beings (as Scotus typically maintains) or not. This latter opinion is the ultimate consequence drawn from Scotus by Ockham who ends up with the dogmatic empiricism: dogmatic, in the sense of postulating the objective existence of individuals (and only individuals) which it never manages to specify, with all other differences and universals being mere abstractions of the mind. We suspect that this, like any other dualism, must eventually dissolve also *both* opposite poles, in this case, also individuals which end up as mere substantial residua. But we often find in Ockham’s reduction of several notions to a single being or concept, a simile of our way of viewing such differences as *aspects* of one *nexus*. Thus, for instance with respect to the current point, “unity is not an accident really distinct from that which is one, and added to it in reality outside the mind.” [W. Ockham, *Summa totius logicae*. I:c.xliv (Though Ockham makes a reservation that he only explains – and does not necessarily subscribe – to this view.)]

outside this limit. In this sense, opposites create each other, though such a “creation” need not be limited only to opposites.

Violence creates mildness, hardness creates softness, repulsion creates attraction (as well as indifference), etc.. Likewise, though in much more complicated ways, very advanced *objects* may enter the *horizon of actuality* which, too, are determined only as limits of *distinctions*. The early church created Greek rationalism, Jerusalem created Athens, not in all respects but exactly in the respect of its opposition to Jerusalem; Luther and Protestantism created catholicism, etc..<sup>10</sup> “Creates”, well, of course all such particular things might have existed before: mildness might have been the general mood of life *until* the first act of violence interrupted it; the church was catholic and Trent only made many of the points of its faith more precise against the protestants. “Create” means often in such contexts a degree of sorting out, perhaps even making conscious and precise, that is, *actualising* some *distinctions* and making them more *precisely visible*. But *actualising* and making *visible* means that the *distinctions* have already been made; the same kind of recognising a *distinction* takes place at the deeper levels where, indeed, the *distinction* enters the world for the very first time. And it does so by being *distinguished* from everything else.

10. Leibniz: “Fictions of the mind, everywhere; and if we cannot discover what is truly a complete being, or a substance, we will have no stopping-point [...]”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, there is no stopping-point. Yet, the lack of any underlying ‘substances’ does not mean that *distinctions* and their limits are ‘fictions of the mind’. On the contrary, they are discoveries – *distinctions* of and in the *indistinct* – found and not created, even if found only by the *distinguishing* *existence* and hence relative to it. Relativity means neither arbitrariness nor subjectivity. Some of ‘things’ are more practical to fix as *objects*, to stop their further differentiation; mostly, those which are prone to be perceived within the *horizon of actuality*. In the *attentive reflection* that it is, it is ‘me’ who determines the termination of such a process. But for the most, the limit of *distinguishing* is determined by my body, by the sensory and perceptive system, by the intellectual criteria or tradition. The common character of these systems makes it natural that ‘we’ mostly agree as to what counts as particular things. Starting from such a basis – and consensus – one may abstract universals, common natures, construct essences, as well as introduce distinctions. But at the bottom of it anything – a piece of chalk, a chair, a leg of the chair, a heap of stones, redness, anxiety, Prague, independence, love – may be *posited* within the *horizon of actuality*, that is, turned into an *object* and thus given the status of a particular. This does not mean that particularity is a fiction of the mind – only that metaphysics of particular ‘substances’ is an enterprise of a very limited validity founded on the equally narrow basis as the metaphysics of actuality.

*Distinguishing* stops somewhere, usually, for purely pragmatic reasons. It is much easier to handle a ‘sofa’, ‘coffee-table’ and each of the three belonging ‘armchairs’ as separate objects than to consider the whole as a one and indivisible ‘sofa group’. But, of course, the latter is possible, too, as is the case whenever you must buy the whole group instead of only one armchair which you actually like and need. Every *object* admits further *distinctions*, the group contains sofa, and table, and..., likewise a chair has all the parts, not to mention a house, the church, the state. The limit surrounding the *object* has nothing metaphysical or absolute about it, it can be pushed further up or down, depending on the circumstances.<sup>12</sup> And thus one has never managed to specify a single ‘substantial form’ of any ‘substance’. For ‘substantial form’ is not an inherent property possessed objectively by ‘substance’, but the mere fact that we have to and hence always do stop *distinguishing* somewhere, that even if the process can always be continued, it is always suspended at some point, though the points may vary.<sup>13</sup> What determines this point may be very

---

<sup>10</sup>In general, there may be a whole series of contraries and not just a binary opposition. Blue does not create red, but not-blue, not-yellow, not... all together give red. All colors mutually condition each other, arise by mutual distinctions from each other.

<sup>11</sup>G. W. Leibniz, *Correspondence with Arnauld*. to Arnauld 30.04 1687.

<sup>12</sup>“But what are the simple constituent parts of which reality is composed? – What are the simple constituent parts of a chair? – The bits of wood of which it is made? Or the molecules, or the atoms? – “Simple” means: not composite. And here the point is: in what sense ‘composite’? It makes no sense at all to speak absolutely of the ‘simple parts of a chair’.” [L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:47] Wittgenstein’s examples in the following paragraphs are quite illustrative.

<sup>13</sup>“[For] each particular there exists at least one monadic universal which makes that particular just one, and not more than one, instance of a certain sort. Such a universal will be a “particularizing” universal, making that particular *one* of a kind.” This does remind strongly about the ‘individuating entity’ of Scotus. But we do not intend to discuss the point any further and only notice that such questions were asked not only by Plato, Aristotle

strange in any particular case and quite different in different cases.

One thirsts, of course, for a universal consensus, and keeps looking but the closest approximation one manages to get is when one resorts to the common *objects* of perception. And even there one finds the obvious differences and impossibility of establishing any final and positive ‘substantial form’. The positive characteristics, supposedly the primary and elementary, are in fact secondary results of *reflective dissociation*; they emerge at the end of the original process of differentiation and *distinguishing*. Of course, the process establishes elaborate structure of *distinctions* so that, when we begin to *distinguish* the chair from the table, we are already in the room and not in the desert, when we begin to *distinguish* the concept of a group from that of a monoid, we are well within the mathematical curriculum and not in the forest, so that *reflection* does not have to explicitly negate the nature, then a forest, then this forest, etc., in order to arrive at a monoid. 11.

Every *distinction* is a boundary, creates two poles of the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ or, perhaps, just ‘left’ and ‘right’. We would thus go further than Lotze who says that a thing is what it does – a thing is everything that it is not. If this seems paradoxical, than observe that the whole work is done here by the word “everything”. A thing (a substance, everything) is but the *sum* of all that it excludes, the limit of *distinctions* from all that *it is not*. This is the whole ‘positive essence’ of anything and knowing one is the same as knowing the other. In this sense, everything indeed reflects the whole universe, every word means something specific only in the context of all other words, microcosmos of every particular reflects the whole macrocosmos. This is also what makes it possible to dissolve (or as one says today, “deconstruct”) any issue, any concept, any theoretical construction and so called “understanding” – in short, any identity – in the infinite filed of correlations, themes and exclusions by a systematic, that is, merciless analysis.

But one may still strongly object for, after all, it is so obviously natural to think in positive terms. Standing in front of a house nobody thinks an infinite series of not-... No, but we certainly distinguish this house from what surrounds it, this is what makes one see this house at all. Learning the concept of a group, nobody thinks an infinite series of not..., no, one thinks perhaps a monoid and adds a few axioms. That is, making new *distinctions* we usually introduce them within some given context, whether the context of *actual situation*, the context of discourse, the context of mathematical definitions and concepts we have acquired, in short, within some ‘positive’ determinations. But there are some things to observe here. The first is that all the examples (mentioned here, and usually mentioned elsewhere) concern *reflective distinguishing*, that is, *distinguishing* which starts with something given. This ‘something given’ is the ‘positive’ background to which some more ‘positive’ attributes are added, as one used to say, it is genus to which one adds *differentia specifca* or, as the case may be, a species to which one adds accidents of material nature to obtain this particular. But where does this ‘positive’ background come from? It is *already distinguished* from other ‘positive’ backgrounds, the ‘positive’ backgrounds mutually limit each other. Well, perhaps, but one may still claim that there is something inherently ‘positive’ which accounts for this mutual limitation. Our point is that all the ‘positive’ content arises only as the limit of *distinguishing* it from others. The ‘positive’ character of the givens is the simple matter of efficiency. 12.

Having  $n$  distinctions which, in general, divide the space independently from each other, we obtain up to  $2^n$  distinct sub-spaces, each one given by a combination of positive or negative (‘left’ or ‘right’) value for each of  $n$  distinctions.<sup>14</sup> (If we denote distinctions by  $d_1, d_2, \dots, d_n$ , and the ‘left’, respectively ‘right’, side of  $d$  by  $d^-$ , respectively  $d^+$ , then a sub-space  $s$  corresponds to a choice  $d_1^{s1} d_2^{s2} \dots d_n^{sn}$  where each  $s_i$  is either + or -.) A new distinction will give  $2^{n+1}$  sub-spaces, i.e., every new distinction amounts to the exponential increase in their total number. Thus if we were to identify every particular thing by the set of *all distinctions* separating it from all the rest of the world, we would be exposed to this exponential growth which would quickly put a limit to our finite abilities. But assume that we now want to make a distinction  $d$  which is relevant only relatively to one – call it  $s$  – of all the  $2^n$  sub-spaces. (E.g., we only want to distinguish blue from yellow, that is, our current  $s$  is the sub-space of colors.) In principle, it would require a

---

or Scholastics but are still topics of fervent discussions. The quotation is from D. M. Armstrong, *Universals and Scientific Realism: A Theory of Universals* 64 [after T. Scaltas, *Substances and Universals in Aristotle's Metaphysics*.]

<sup>14</sup>Limiting, for the sake of simplicity, the attention to binary *distinctions*, cf. footnote 10. Admitting *distinctions* with up to  $k$  contraries does not affect the argument: we only replace the basis 2 with  $k$ .

new level of  $2^{n+1}$  possibilities from which only two are of interest: those *within s* which lie on the ‘left’ or on the ‘right’ of the new *d*. Having fixed *s*, perhaps giving it a name, perhaps associating with it something more than that, in short, turning it into a ‘positive’ entity, we may now refer to the new possibilities as *sd<sup>+</sup>*, respectively *sd<sup>-</sup>*, instead of the whole sequences  $d_1^{s1}d_2^{s2}\dots d_n^{sn}d^+$ , respectively  $d_1^{s1}d_2^{s2}\dots d_n^{sn}d^-$ . Explaining to somebody what “yellow” means, we do not start by saying that it is not a body, nor the taste of lemon, nor the view from Mount Everest, nor... We start by saying that it is a color – this limits immediately the horizon of attention to the relevant sub-space.<sup>15</sup> Thus, stopping the *distinctions* at some points and assigning to their limits at these points ‘positive’ determination – which simply forgets the chain of negations which constitute it – reduces the burden of explicitly handling further distinctions which are to appear *within* these, not ‘positive’, sub-spaces. The ‘positive’ determinations allow one to forget the – enormous and typically reflectively unknown – number of *distinctions* which, although present, would only disturb dealing with the *actual object* confusing the context with a multitude of irrelevancies. Nevertheless, the mutuality of *distinctions*, their full series behind the ‘positive’ determinations, can always be invoked and sometimes even used to disturb the discourse.

13. Thus, although we grant the positive determinations with their eventual expression in the idea of a ‘substance’ all practical value, we view them exclusively as such: pragmatic devices. The ontological status of ‘substances’, ‘substantial forms’ and the like is, like of most other things, the same as their epistemological status, which in this case is: the limits of *distinctions*.<sup>16</sup> *Omni determinatio est negatio*.

We bring thus, indeed, elements of negative theology into the trivial matters, traditionally treated easily by the positive finitude of the Greek dislike for even the slightest smell of *apeiron*. Certainly, a possible and most natural issue for discussion and investigation is *where* the actual limits are drawn and what ‘positive’ contents they determine. But as the Aristotelians have spent on that few thousands years, we could hardly contribute to the discussions in any way. Above all, we consider their focus slightly mistaken because they are almost always underlined by the *objectivistic* assumption of studying the ‘real’, the ‘substances’ and ‘essences’. We do not believe in metaphysical status of some absolute ‘substances’, we do not take the particular things as something more primordial than the *horizon of actuality*. Nor vice versa. For just like a particular thing is no ultimate ‘substance’, so neither is the *horizon of actuality*, in the present case, the *immediacy*, ‘the shortest unit of experienced time’ any absolute unit – it is just an aspect of an experience of a particular thing. The two mutually condition each other, form a *nexus* – a whole system of correlated and mutually dependent aspects: an *immediate actuality* is constituted by an experience of a particular thing, and a particular thing would never appear if it were not dissociated and narrowed down to the horizon of *immediate actuality*.

The eventual dissolution of any thing, as its supposedly accidental features and properties are being removed, is now a standard objection against the very notion of a ‘substance’. We share it and, as stated in §9, do not find ‘out there’ any solid and indissoluble ‘substances’. But we find them everywhere where our thoughts, perceptions, feelings, acts and activities stop for even a shortest moment and bring out of the *chaotic flux* and *indistinct* background something which can be retained and carried over to the next moment. The idea of a substance has a solid foundation in the elementary operation of *reflection*, in the observation that *it is*, in this *reflective positing* of a being as the limit of *distinctions*. It is a constant aspect of experience, the result of the real, actually performed, acts which comprise the horizon of attention to the extreme limit of *immediacy*.

14. The idealisation of things, their reduction to *objective*, ‘substantial’ points affects an analogous reduction on the side of the *subject*. Historically, a lot of time and reflective effort has been needed to fetch the *subject* out of the cave where it was put along with the ‘subjectivity’, sophistry and the like offenders of objectivistic seriousness. The idea of a purely *immediate subject*, a *subject* which no longer has anything to do with human existence but merely with the logic of universal – and as momentaneous as timeless – constitution, may appear as the extreme offense to this seriousness but, as a matter of fact, it only recognises a *subject* which is a true accomplice of the *immediate givenness* of the *object*, which resides within the same, whether temporal or spatial,

---

<sup>15</sup>This, by the way, may be necessary even if we were to attempt an ostensive definition, as observed in L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* I:27-28.

<sup>16</sup>Let us only remember that living beings are excluded from the present considerations.

horizon. It emerges with the epistemology of Cartesian ‘cogito’ and reaches its peak with the problematic of constitution within German idealism. The transcendental subject operates always in the ideal *immediacy* of an unextended point, its *object* appears in the *immediacy* of a single act which, carrying the burden of the constitution of the whole world, becomes as complicated as it is instantaneous. Contents appearing at a point *dissociated* from its surroundings, from its temporal and spatial context, appear as arbitrary or, whenever one wants to effect more positive connotations, as spontaneous. The mad spontaneity of an *immediate subject* is just the other side of the arbitrariness of the *object* emerging – no matter through how intricate meanders of transcendental constitution – *ex nihilo*, not even in the *actuality* of *here-and-now*, but in the ideal limit of pure and timeless *immediacy*. Consciousness – whether Descartes’ cogito, Kant’s ‘I think’, Fichte’s Ego, Husserl’s transcendental consciousness or Sartre’s for-itself – is *actual* through and through, is an *immediate*, instantaneous – and by the same token, or rather *only in this sense*, spontaneous – act of constitution of an *object*. Spontaneity of this act of endowing with form (informing?) is, as we just said, only another side of the arbitrariness of the appearing matter – both aspects, *dissociated* from the surrounding background of experience, find no other justification beyond the positive connotations of the word “spontaneous” which, in fact, could equally well be replaced by “whimsical”.

### 1.1.3. Transcendence

*Reflection that it is* experiences the transcendence of its *object* primarily as its *externality*. We 15. could almost say that it is nothing else than such an *experience of externality*, that *externality* is the universal content of every *reflection* which merely notices *that it is*. This is even the case with the spark which burns me. Although the *sign*, *object* and *reflex* coincide temporarily, the very localisation, the very narrowing of the horizon of the event and reaction, amounts to *externalisation*. It is not me, it only affects me; it does not involve me, only a part of my body. *Externalisation* does not have any inherent connection to extension or space, only to the narrowing of the temporal horizon to a minute, *immediate experience*. It is the eventually abstract minuteness which constitutes the sense of being somehow foreign, not quite mine, *external*. The aspect of *spatiality* enters this relation as simultaneity, in that the *external object* is experienced simultaneously and ‘as’ simultaneous with the *subject* of this very experience.

This simultaneity, however, has all the ambiguity of different levels. It is indeed co-extensional with the *horizon of actuality*, but also it harbours the *reflective act* which, narrowing this *horizon*, arrives after its contents. This dissonance between the *immediacy* of the given *object* and its temporal sliding in the *reflective after* is exactly the experience of *externality* with the germinal element of non-*actuality*, the most elementary form of *horizontal transcendence*.

We have also pointed out the character of double *dissociation* involved in *externality*, I:§57. On the one hand, *externality* is an aspect of consciousness encountering its *object* as distinct from itself, which amounts to the same as self-consciousness, I:3.3. But the sharp distinctness of the *object* from consciousness is but another side of its *dissociation* from the background, from its origin. An *object*, imprisoned within the horizon of *immediacy*, has been *dissociated* from everything else. Its independence, its being entirely ‘on its own’ is, on the one hand, the apparently constitutive feature of its ‘substantiality’ and, on the other hand, its fundamental lack, its abstract unreality. The strangeness of an *object* appearing in the *reflection that it is*, the strangeness of its being at all is, in fact, the strangeness of its being here ‘on its own’, of its being so strangely alone. The *virtual signification* makes itself thus particularly strongly felt along with the *external objects* – their *externality* is the ultimate trace of *signification*.

This unreality, which is both a part of the *immediate experience* as such and of the *reflective attitude* towards it, is the *vertical aspect of transcendence* involved here. An *object* dissociated from its background and surroundings, a pure ‘substance’, appears as a spontaneous (arbitrary) fact *that it is* – as intriguing as it is meaningless. Not only has it no reason to be so and not otherwise – it has no reason to be at all. “*Why* is there something rather...?” This may give rise to the existentialistic nausea; but it may also be grasped with a grateful fascination or detached thankfulness. However, these later cases are possible because they already involve more than the pure *immediacy* of the given, because they already witness to the *vertical dimension* of

*transcendence*.<sup>17</sup>

## 1.2 Actuality

Let us now consider much more mundane cases of what, in the more common sense of the word, would be called “experiences”; situations which are not reduced to a single moment but which are organised within a relatively short, yet not *immediate* time span; experiences with a finite and limited but no longer extensionless temporal scope.

### 1.2.1. Complexes

17. Entering a room for the first time, I acquire first a vague, general impression of its character. It may be ugly, cosy, warm, cold, dark, pleasant... After a few moments in the room, my experience of it changes in that I now become more attentive to its various aspects and parts. Looking around I notice the arrangement of furniture, the colors, fracture of the walls etc. At the same time the room itself recedes in the background, I no longer perceive the room but this window, this corner, this armchair. If, however, suddenly asked “How do you like this room?” I can at once posit the whole room as the totality to be addressed. I can now analyze its aspects and point out their interplay, but the object of my talk is the room. It is both a unity and a multiplicity. If I try to see all of the room I will easily fail, if I try to embrace simultaneously all the details I have learned about it in one act, I can, at best, summarise them in a general impression. Very often, if not typically, the very same impression I had on entering the room. But I know that this totality is composed of much more than this impression, this *original sign* which is all of the totality of the room that I can *actualise*.

A room exemplifies what one typically considers to be objects of experience. *Actual experiences* involve not just isolated *objects* but their *complexes*, also in the sense that a single *object* may appear as a *complex*, either a totality of some parts, or a unity involved in an interplay of relations with other *objects*. No such *complexes* are more fundamental than others. Before a child sees that a chair can be moved away from the table, the two can be experienced as one *complex*; one, because neither is yet definitely *dissociated* from the other, and *complex* because itself internally differentiated. A picture hanging on the wall is not part of the wall, nor something on it – there is neither a picture nor a wall but a totality of one *complex*. Once we have learned that chairs and tables come separately and that different pictures may be hang on the same wall, we live with the immediate consciousness of these *complexes* whenever we encounter them. But this is the end rather than the beginning of the story.

*A variety of aspects becomes one complex when it is cut out of experience as both differentiated beyond the actual givens and yet posited as one totality within the horizon of actuality through a unifying, actual sign.*

In this sense, *complexes* are like *objects* which emerge not due to any metaphysical ‘substantial form’, but due to their particular relation to the *horizon of actuality*. The constitutive feature of *complexes* is that, while they are *recognised* as *totalities*, sometimes even as *objects*, they present themselves, so to speak, incompletely; although given in an *actual experience*, they are not fully *actual*, they are always *signs* which carry with them more *distinctions* slipping out of the *horizon of actuality*.<sup>18</sup>

18. The word “thing”, which was used for a correlate of an *immediate* experience, should not mislead

<sup>17</sup> Although one might be tempted to apply here Hegelian schemata, there is no need for such. The situation itself is here abstracted from *experience* and, if it appears meaningless and unsatisfactory, it is only for a special kind of *reflective* attitude. The *vertical dimension* of *transcendence* is here only another level of experience, is the *experience* in the context of which this *immediacy* found place. It is not something towards which the Spirit is driven by the force of dialectical negation – at best (or, rather, at worst) it is something towards which philosophical reflection is driven by whatever force drives it.

<sup>18</sup> To refer to protentions and retentions again – one might argue that everything is a *complex*, that every experience, every perception involves this kind of sliding away out of the *horizon of actuality*. But such an argument would be based on the idealisation postulating an idealised scope of the *horizon of actuality*, namely, an extensionless point. By its very nature, it cannot contain anything and so everything must slide away. Thus, it would have to reject the *immediate experiences*. We do not reject it, though we do not claim that it has any privileged epistemological function – it allows for further differentiation and *dissociation* into ever more minute idealities.

one to think exclusively of a thing. Its constitutive feature is that, appearing within the immediate limit of the *horizon of actuality*, its experience coincides with its *sign*. Its self-identity, its ‘substantiality’ is a derivative of that. In practice, a thing may be almost anything. When I enter a new room, my first *immediate* experience is not of furniture, walls, pictures etc. but of ‘???’ which then turns out to be ... this room. (At least, as long as there are no unusual objects which, attracting my attention, would prevent me from seeing the room.) I do not look attentively into each corner, contemplate the ceiling, the floor, in order to finally conclude “Yeah, it is this room”. At first, it is ‘??’, that is, the thing of my experience and it is, of course, no thing in the usual sense. It becomes more like a usual thing when I realise that it is actually the room, though then one may at once start asking the questions about unity and ‘substantiality’ of an *object* versus ‘totality’ of a *complex*.

The thinghood or *objecthood* of something is constituted by the possibility of grasping it fully (that is, without experiencing that anything was left outside) in one act. The complexes may be, ‘objectively’, the same things. But in addition to being experienced as *objects*, involving merely unity, their experience involves also multiplicity, *totality* of aspects or elements. The experience of complexes involves therefore not only their *objective* unity but also the experience of their being complex, even if not of their full complexity.

### 1.2.2. The signs

The involved *signs* refer not only to the immediate ‘givens’ but also to the aspects which, at the moment of experience, are not present within the *horizon of actuality* – and are experienced as such (like all the parts of the room which I know are there, which I have seen and registered, but which are not ‘given’ in the same way as those I am *actually* looking at). The differences between various *signs* of complexes concern primarily whether they focus on the aspect of unity or multiplicity involved in a *complex*.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Original signs*

I wake up and feel strength, a lot of vital energy, a joyful vigor. Is it the sunny morning which is the cause of that? Was it the light supper yesterday evening? Is it...? It does not really matter. Hopefully, it will last the day long but it may also easily disappear very shortly. No matter what its reason might be, the *mood* does reveal me something, if not anything specific then, in any case, ‘how I am now’. And this both reflects and will be reflected in my perception of the situation, for I will act differently (even if doing the same things, say, while getting up and preparing breakfast) than I would if I woke up and felt fragile, feeble and low.<sup>20</sup>

I leave the house, drive to the city, park my car and enter a cafe. I am enjoying the perspective of a quite hour over a cup of coffee and a good book. The coffee I get is not exactly the best, but it is not enough to spoil the *mood*. Unexpectedly, I see a friend approaching my table. He asks how long I have been here, how I came here, where I parked my car. At this moment I realise that I locked my keys in the car. Oh sh...t! The *mood* of the expected quietude disappears suddenly and I am getting upset. What makes me so? Not the keys locked in my car because, in themselves, they are too little to ruin a nice hour. It is the whole *complex* of the situation, the anticipated trouble, perhaps, the money I have to pay, the spoiled hour at the cafe. The simple fact of locked keys is certainly the focal point of the whole situation but my being upset unveils much more than this simple fact, this single *impression* unveils the significance of the simple fact which has been placed in a broader, *complex* context of related facts and consequences.

Calm voice of my friend, reassuring me that it is no big problem, we just call this and that number, wait outside smoking a cigarette and they will come and open the car, helps a lot. One could say, he only rationalises away my *impression*. Indeed, but how? By bringing into the situation aspects, points of view, possible solutions and, not least, his calm attitude, which all together modify the *complex* and, consequently, my *impression*.

The *original signs* of *actuality* are all kinds of such *moods* and *impressions*.<sup>19</sup> They are direct and original in the sense that they can be experienced without the respective *complex* being *actually* given. In fact, they often appear before the respective *complexes*. I can get a feeling of fear without knowing exactly what is frightening me. I can be in a bad mood without knowing exactly

<sup>19</sup>One might say that, for instance, *moods* are lasting *impressions* or draw even more specific distinctions. We will, however, not attempt to differentiate here any further.

why. In this respect, *moods* are typically not accompanied by the respective *complexes* at all, they merely announce ... well, my general *mood*.

The border between the *impression* and the *complex* it announces may be very vague. The difference between ‘violent passion’ and ‘passionate violence’, between ‘intense curiosity’ and ‘curious intensity’ is as discernible as it is negligible. In the evening we are sitting with some friends around a table in a pub having an enjoyable conversation about nothing. After some time a neighbour who was sitting on his own joins in. There is some intense curiosity in his eyes and as if slight irritability in the way they search through the whole place. But he seems to be doing quite well in joining and, in fact, modifying the conversation. After a few questions and answers he focuses on something particular one of us said and follows it up with more and more detailed questions. “So what did you really mean by that?” ... Hmmm. “Was it this or that? But then, you see, you would have to say that...” His interest seems a bit uneasy, perhaps, impolite and too detailed but so far there is nothing directly wrong with it. And nothing wrong happens later on, either. After leaving the place, all of us have the same *impression* of the guy with a somewhat inquisitive attitude, as if afraid of unveiling his own meanings; interrogative, a bit like a detective. It is impossible to say at which point this *impression* started to make itself felt. Was it when he started to ask the questions? Was it when he joined our conversation? Even earlier? Likewise, it is impossible to say to what precisely this *impression* refers. We could mention a lot of small examples, things he said, ways he looked but it is not the mere sum of such minute particulars. Saying “the detective” means much more the *impression* he created than any of his ‘objectively given’ features. Of course, there is far from here to any judgment of the person, but the *impression* has already painted a whole, even if incomplete, picture. Referring to him, we will now say “the detective”.

22. We can thus list three characteristic features of the *original signs* at the current level. These *signs* announce the *complexes* lending them their unity, they comprise a *totality* of a *complex*, situation or object, into a unity of one *sign*, the distinctive quality of the *mood* or *impression*. An *impression*, “an emotion is always a simple predicate substituted by an operation of the mind for a highly complicated predicate.”<sup>20</sup> This is the fundamental role of *original signs* of *complexes*, and also what distinguishes them from *reflective signs*.

Another common feature of all the above examples is that the given *mood* allows a certain variation of more minute impressions, of perceptions and *immediate sensations*. More generally, one can experience the same *mood* in different situations. The *original signs* of *actuality* may be as if incarnated in a variety of lesser forms. “Every one knows how when a painful thing has to be undergone in the near future, the vague feeling that it is impending penetrates all our thought with uneasiness and subtly vitiates our mood even when it does not control our attention; it keeps us from being at rest, at home in the given present.”<sup>21</sup> A more pervasive *mood*, like that induced by the pending expectation, may allow for modifications of more minute *moods* and, in particular, for a large variation in the sensations, perceptions and *immediate signs*.

Finally, beside the possibility of a more or less clear distinction between the *complex* and the associated *impression*, we also notice the less reactive character of *impressions*. *Impressions* do not constitute *complexes* – they are both aspects of *actuality* and the latter may also appear without associated *impressions*. But any *impression* indicates a *complex*, a *cut* from the experience which, through the *impression*, receives a unified *sign*. This *complex* may be, in fact, close to indistinguishable from the very *impression* announcing it. Thus, *complexes* have a very wide meaning: a table, a room, a situation, two weeks in Prague, inquisitiveness of a person, all are examples of *complexes*, of things which are differentiated into aspects and various sides, but which, nevertheless, appear as *totalities*, as focal points of all the involved differences. The interplay of these differences is the *mood* or, the *mood* is what gathers the interplay of *just these* differences.

23. **Reflective signs**

*Moods* and *impressions* give the *complex* a unified *sign* through which the *complex* appears within the *horizon of actuality*. The corresponding *reflection* will no longer stop at the mere observation *that it is* but will now observe *that it is so-and-so*; it will go beyond the attentive positing of something that merely is, surrounding it with all kinds of accidents, predicates, properties. *Reflection* differentiates the unity of a *complex*, the unity of an *impression* into multiplicity of

---

<sup>20</sup>C. S. Pierce, *Some consequences of four incapacities*. III;p.58

<sup>21</sup>W. James, *Essays in Pragmatism*. I;p.13

its aspects and elements. Eventually, reflection creates lists, lists of properties, aspects, features, and then tries to reconstruct the totality of the *complex* out of these scattered parts. We will call these reflective signs of complexes “*concepts*” and “*thoughts*” – totalities organised around a unity which, however, for the attentive reflection remains typically only a mere *sign*, an ideal limit.<sup>22</sup>

These words have here a broad meaning. There is nothing particular in a *concept* except that its unity gathers a collection of actually discernible, more or less precise characteristics. Discussing the detective or the locked keys, one will collect a whole series of thoughts which make up the important aspects of the situations. Eventually, the whole *complex* may become a single *thought*, although this will merely mean establishing a simple *sign*, like “the detective” which now, in a truly artificial fashion, signifies the respective *complex*. There may be a difference between ‘the detective’ taken as such a *concept* or as an *impression*, but then it concerns the psychology and certainly not the content. For even the artificiality and vagueness of the *concept* ‘the detective’ has most serious fundament in the experience which converges at the unity of the original *impression*. In a sense, to be a *concept*, a *sign* has to be ‘primitive’ – it must draw a set of *distinctions* as a unity, no matter how coherently or incoherently, how logically or illogically they are related.<sup>23</sup>

Just as an *impression* “is always a simple [sign] substituted by an operation of the mind for a highly complicated predicate”, so a *concept* substitutes a ‘complicated predicate’ arrived at by analysis for the simple *sign*.<sup>24</sup> Thus, psychologically, the two are incommensurate: at any *actual* moment, it is either *concept* or an *impression* but never both. If, involved in a situation, one tries to observe the arising *impressions*, they will get polluted and falsified; *I* can not reflectively catch, not to mention, control *myself* in the moment of getting an *impression*. Trying something like that, dissolves all *actual impressions*, makes them withdraw behind the imposed reflective contents. Likewise, proceeding with a conceptual analysis, *I* can not pay attention to the *impressions* which, possibly, accompany it in the background. A *concept* is an externalised intuition, an *impression externalised* as a list of its most minutely discernible aspects. The two may appear in any order and the transition between them is rather smooth – the moment when a *thought*, or a series of *thoughts* becomes an *impression* or vice versa is often imperceptible.

Yet, although the two can not be reflectively posited and observed simultaneously, they can always go together. It is not only that, sometimes, one can talk oneself out of an *impression*, not only that a unified *impression* already contains the possible results of decomposing it into a series of *thoughts*. Every reflective *sign*, every *thought has a mood*, it creates an associated *impression* which reflects the unity posited by the *thought*. (Of course, receptivity to and above all the significance one attaches to such *moods* may vary tremendously.) “Every concept in our conscious mind, in short, has its own psychic associations. While such associations may vary in intensity (according to the relative importance of the concept to our whole personality, or according to the other ideas and even complexes to which it is associated in our unconscious), they are capable of changing the ‘normal’ character of that concept.”<sup>25</sup> Every system of thought has a *mood*, every philosophy has, besides its more or less intricate hierarchy and system of *concepts* and ideas, a general *mood* which hangs like a cloud above and flavours its more specific aspects. And sure, just like my understanding of the situation with the locked car keys influences my *impression* of it, so will one’s understanding of a philosophical system influence its *mood*, the shape and the density of the cloud.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Again, we are not interested in any (im)possibly detailed analyses of thought processes and their dependence on the available and unavailable concepts. We allow ourselves to conflate the thought and the concept, just as earlier we conflated the *distinction* understood as the act of distinguishing and as the distinguished content.

<sup>23</sup>This unity, which lacks any *conceptual* unity, together with the fact that its ‘content’ is the respective experiential limit of *distinctions*, are the reasons why almost no *concept* is definable. For instance, “‘doorknob’ is primitive (unstructured); and, for that matter, so is too practically everything else. [every other concept]” [J. A. Fodor, *Concepts*. VII;p.147] Yet, this primitive undefinability concerns only the unity, the line where the limit of *distinctions* is drawn; it does not mean that various concepts are completely independent from each other, that “[s]atisfying the metaphysically necessary conditions for having one concept *never* requires satisfying the metaphysically necessary conditions for having any other concept.” If one claims that “a mind that has only one concept (say, ‘doorknob’) is a metaphysical possibility”, then one obviously means by “metaphysical possibility” merely the lack of logical impossibility. Such a claim is only yet another example of empirical atomism whose epistemic flavour quickly pollutes also ontology.

<sup>24</sup>The Latin *conceptus* reflects well the tension between the unity of the origin/embryo (retained in the English “conception”) and the multiplicity which it gathers and stores as in a container.

<sup>25</sup>C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*. p.29

<sup>26</sup>This *mood* is like the *sign* of typical experience underlying the given philosophy (provided that it has character

25. ***Essences***

As being, the fact that *it is*, has been delegated to the limit of an extensionless and incomprehensible simplicity of a point, §8, there must remain some positive content which may be assigned to such contentless points, there must remain some *distinctions* which could justify *distinguishing* one thing from another. There is also the problem with the exponential growth of the number of the negative, exclusive *distinctions* which can be restricted to a smaller number of inclusive, positive determinations, §12. These two, only apparently quite unrelated, problems of coping with the ideal points which reject to cease being multidimensional *complexes*, are handled by *dissociating* being from its character, the existential from the intelligible, the mere fact of being, *esse*, from that which makes a being what it is, *quo est*, i.e., the forms or ‘essences’ of beings.<sup>27</sup>

“The essence of each thing is what it is said to be *propter se* [...] the essence is precisely what something is.”<sup>28</sup> The essence captures the ... essential and it does it in a unique and precise way, it captures the ultimate truth about what it means to be this thing: “Each thing itself, then, and its essence are one and the same.”<sup>29</sup> We certainly won’t spend time on studying the modulations of the idea of essence and its detailed relations to substances, forms, common natures, complete notions and other themes which surrounded the idea in its long history. We notice only its role: “there is an essence only of those things whose formula is a definition. [...] definition is the formula of the essence, and essence belongs to substances either alone or chiefly and primarily and in the unqualified sense.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the “attributes attaching essentially to their subjects attach *necessarily* to them”<sup>31</sup>. ‘Essences’ make the ideal of necessary truths and knowledge, of the *immediate* givenness, possible. The goal, if not the achievement, of ‘essences’ is to reduce a *complex* to something which can be adequately given in pure *actuality*, ideally, even in the *immediate* intuition. An ‘essence’, whether with Aristotle, Descartes or Husserl is a graspable unit which can be made *actual* in a single act of intuition, apperception, understanding, or whatever variation of a *reflective* act one needed to *posit*. The supposed ‘essences’ where to give metaphysical rigidity and precision to the *distinctions* of experience, were to turn *distinctions* into precise, rigid distinctions. And *precision* is but another word for *immediate* ‘givenness’. An ‘essence’ is the *reflective* hope of *immediacy*.<sup>32</sup>

26. However, to understand something is not to grasp its supposed ‘essence’ but to know its limits. It may amount to knowing *what* separates this thing from others but usually it suffices to knowing *where* the boundary between this thing and its surrounding goes. The difference is the same as between the assumed positive contents and the negative limits of *distinctions* discussed in section

---

– for as Nietzsche says: only “[i]f one has character one also has one’s typical experience which recurs again and again.” [F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. 70]) Say, for example, the mood of Heidegger: gnostic thirst for the hidden truth and resentment over its absence in the lower world and among fellow men; the mood of Nietzsche: unrewarded intensity turning into violent despair, heroic scream lost in the darkness; the mood of Spinoza: he who is satisfied with oneself need not judge others, but deep satisfaction with oneself is not from this world; the mood of Wittgenstein was accurately described as empirical mysticism or, perhaps, mystification of empiricism; etc., etc. Finding such superficial and general characteristics insufficient does not change the fact that one, nevertheless, recognises their origins, one understands the *mood*.

<sup>27</sup> Although the distinction has been present before, it comes clearly forth in the existential focus of Aquinas, who builds much of his philosophy on the refinement of the Boethian distinction between *quod est* and *quo est* by adding to it the third term, *esse*, accounting for the observations like that “I can understand what a man is or what a phoenix is and nevertheless not know whether either has existence in reality. Therefore, it is clear that existence is something other than the essence or *quiddity*, unless perhaps there is something whose *quiddity* is its very own existence, and this thing must be one and primary.” [St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*. IV] Let us notice only in passing how the arguments of such a form conform to the principle of realism-empiricism from I:5.2.4, which postulates dissociated existence of everything distinguishable.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. VII:4

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. VII:6

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. VII:4;5

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*. I:6

<sup>32</sup> ‘Essences’ correspond only to intelligible ‘substances’ and, in fact and eventually, to the intelligibility of ‘substances’ (one should probably keep in mind that the original Greek *ousia* can be, and in various contexts is, translated as either substance or essence). Providing thus a basis for the sphere of intelligibility, they are intimately related to sufficient reasons, efficient causes and all the other means of the attempted reduction to *actuality*, coverage of the possible differentiations by final, closed definitions. The reduction amounts to the faith that if everything consists of ‘essences’ and their interplay, of positively definite and closed entities interacting with each others, then there is little reason to suspect that these interactions are of entirely different character and can not be exhausted by an analogous modeling. On the other hand, when the ‘interacting’ entities do not have final definitions and, having lost their ‘essence’, can always unveil a new and unexpected side, then also the conditions influencing their ‘interactions’ get loosened, and one can hardly guarantee the effects expected of the sufficient and efficient reasons.

### 1.1.2, in particular, §12.

To understand something, one has to start with this ‘something’ which is already given, recognised. (As Scholastics would say, an “act of judgment in reference to a *complexum* [proposition] presupposes an act of apprehending the same proposition.”<sup>33</sup>) The initial moment of understanding is a *reflection* which isolates this ‘something’ as an *actual object*. Often, we may at first not even know what it is that we are trying to understand – something happened, but for the moment it remains a mere ‘something’, because I do not know what it was, whence it came nor what it meant. Only an *original sign* has appeared, which, in spite of, or rather precisely *through* its vagueness, calls for a closer attention. Then, and only then, the questions like “What is this thing?”, “What makes it what it is?” can be asked. They ask for an explication of the involved *cut*, of the boundaries separating something already recognised from the rest. The answer involves further *reflection*, which now attempts to isolate these boundaries from the totality of the *complex*. Thus explication *dissociates* further, it *dissociates* the boundaries from the *complex* they bind, ‘essence’ from ‘substance’, in search for the eventual definition, the rigid limit of the involved *distinctions*.

But explication has no ‘given’ limit. Although in a given context, say of making a table, it may be natural not to ask questions about the atomic structure of the wood, or about consequences of the act for the world peace or future generations, such or similar questions are always possible and may bring in *distinctions* which were not at all involved in the original situation. Every *distinction* and limit thereof which has not been drawn to the ideal limit of a point can be refined which often means: considered in another context. Trying to understand the concept of a group, I do start with its definition, but the process involves necessarily relating it to other concepts, seeing what happens if I drop some axioms, if I add some, analysing possible examples and non-examples, relating it to a monoid, perhaps to a ring, etc. Understanding is relative to the context in which the thing is considered and this context influences the boundaries of the thing. If the only other concept I have is that of a monoid, my understanding of group may be very poor. (Yet, it will be understanding! A group is distinguished from a monoid.) If I am able to relate the group to a large variety of other concepts, the understanding will be respectively deeper – group will be distinguished from more things/concepts with which it otherwise might be confused.

In principle, I should also take into account something which happens entirely implicitly, namely, that some contexts are completely irrelevant. I won’t try to relate the mathematical groups to cows, or light, or my mother. Although implicit, this is equally essential aspect of understanding since it, too, tells something about the limits of the thing. Many jokes and, in general, laughter work by violating the assumptions of such implicit contexts and dissolving the rigidity of a form in the flow of the surrounding background. As we observed, this aspect of excluding the irrelevant is usually taken care of by the ‘positive’ determinations which had been assigned to various limits of *distinctions*.

Now, the point is that rigidity of some limits of *distinctions* is only ideal and, at best, secondary. Do you understand what a ‘wave’ is? Whenever at the seashore, you can recognise waves or else see that there are none. You know ‘what makes a wave’. But, do you? What is it? How high must it be in order to be a ‘wave’? And where does one ‘wave’ end and another begins? It is impossible to say because there are no definite, rigid limits. There are only vague *cuts* which tell “this is a wave and this is another”. I may be unable to tell exactly where one wave ends and another begins, but still I am perfectly able to select some area, perhaps, around the peak, and say that this marks a wave.<sup>34</sup> We do not have an *explicit* understanding of a ‘wave’ because we are

<sup>33</sup>W. Ockham, *Ordinatio*. Prologue, q.1

<sup>34</sup>Leibniz would say that we have a *clear* but ‘confused’ understanding of a ‘wave’. A clarification may be in place since the words will occur quite often. *Clear* is not opposite of *vague* but of *precise*. *Clear* can be conjoined with *vague* in the way entirely analogical to that in which Leibniz associates *clear* and ‘confused’ knowledge. “When I recognise one thing among others without being able to say what its differences or properties consist in, my knowledge is ‘confused’. In this way we sometimes know ‘clearly’, without being in any doubt, whether a poem or a painting is good or bad, because there is a certain *je ne sais quoi* which pleases or offends us.” [G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*. 24.] The insistence of this *je ne sais quoi* has been obviously destined to eternal recurrence. “It is possible to ‘understand’ something, deeply, intimately, without ‘grasping’ it rationally, for instance, music.” [R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. XVIII] “Vague” corresponds to Leibniz’ “confused”, that is, “indistinct”. The phrase *je ne sais quoi* (“I do not know what”, ‘a certain something’) expresses quite accurately the rest, the impossibility of grasping this ‘certain something’ within the *horizon of actuality*. *Precision* amounts to excluding, cutting off (*praescindere*) all that threatens with slipping out of *immediate control*. This exclusion is what is *precise* about, for instance, a *concept*. It can be taken as an opposite of *clarity* – it increases with the

unable to isolate reflectively its limits. But we know that it is not a whirlpool, nor a current, nor a building. We are able to delimit it against other things and these *distinctions*, whether verbalised or not, make the ‘wave’ concept sufficiently familiar.

‘Wave’ is a much more fundamental example than a ‘group’ or a ‘chair’, and understanding the former illustrates much better the process of understanding which always originates in what some call “tacit knowledge” and which we call “*recognition of experience*”. An *object* is a limit of *distinctions*, of *cuts* from the background of experience and thus an *experience* of something involves obviously its tacit understanding. Explication of this understanding is but a further reflection which tries to isolate the limits of a thing. Sometimes, such an isolation may be carried very far and sometimes it can not.

29. One might perhaps say that the ‘essence’ of a thing is the totality of what *distinguishes* it from other things. Perhaps to grasp the supposed ‘essence’ is the same as to know the thing’s limits. Perhaps, though then we have changed a bit the traditional sense of the word “essence”. In particular, we must admit that no such final ‘essences’ obtain since, as said in §27, what distinguishes a thing from others depends on what others we take into account. The field of references here is inexhaustible.

If one had managed to display at least one convincing ‘essence’, one might, perhaps, also manage to arrive at some acceptable concept of a concept. No such thing seems to be available but, fortunately, cognitive scientists took over the quarrels. Since terminating the *distinctions* at *some* limit is unavoidable, somebody will always think worthwhile to ask what the ‘essence’ of, say, a chair, might be. Typically it has four legs, but it may have only one, or none but rockers instead. One may try to define it functionally, as “something to sit on”, but then anything I can sit on becomes a chair, for instance a table. One need not deny sincere ingenuity of many attempts to specify the most purposeful way of defining things. But one should not confuse the forensic and normative character of such endeavors with any ontological foundation, not to mention existential relevance.

“The time has arrived to give up the myths of induction and *Wesenschau*, which are carried over, as some point of honour, from generation to generation. For it is clear that even Husserl himself never gained *Wesenschau* so that he would not have to re-consider and re-work it again, not to disqualify it but to force it to express something that it originally did not express at all [...]”<sup>35</sup> The fact, which should have been disturbing, that nobody ever managed to demonstrate unchangeable ‘essence’ of anything, except, perhaps, for normative definitions, in particular in mathematics, reflects the secondary character of *concepts* as compared to the *original signs* and, above all, the merely auxiliary character of positive, ‘essential’ determinations. It reflects also the accidental character of most *totalities* – no *complex* is more fundamental than others and there is no necessity for a *complex* to be so rather than otherwise – primordially, it is but a *cut* from *experience*. The boundaries between things are, more often than not, *vague* enough to defy *precise* definition but also *clear* enough to admit understanding.

30. But, one might worry, have not we gone a bit too far? Does not a group, in its strict mathematical sense, have a well defined essence? Well, this kind of mathematical analogies have rather bad history in philosophy, so one better be careful with them. But OK, it is a well defined *concept* with unambiguous definition. What does it show? That if we start with *concepts*, some ‘primitive’ and uniquely defined ones, we may arrive at new ones. This can certainly extend far beyond mathematics. Have you never met an intellectual who is not able to relate to the world otherwise than through the *concepts* and definitions he has acquired? His knowledge may be impressive but still this omniscience is as pitiable as his apparent omnipotence. The power of conceptualisation, like of *reflection* in general, concerns only the *actuality* of *signs*. Its domain is exclusively the incessant *reflection* over things modeled as *objects*, as independent ‘substances’ – reduced to their ‘intelligible essences’. “Since I have never been able to understand what the ‘essence’ of a concept is,

---

narrowing of attention towards the limit of *immediate actuality*, which diminishes the latter. Leibniz also associates ‘confused’ with the large number of aspects which, so to speak, make it impossible to comprehend them distinctly in one act. “Our confused feelings are the result of a variety of perceptions which is indeed infinite – very like the confused murmur a person hears when approaching the sea-shore, which comes from the putting together of the reverberations of innumerable waves.” [G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*. 33] He does not use the word “clear” here which might strike one as inappropriate, but this is exactly the word we might use. Thus, although not synonymous, “clear” is close to co-extensional with Leibniz’ “confused”, i.e., “vague”.

<sup>35</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. Inquiry and intuition; p.122

I must be excused from discussing this point any longer.”<sup>36</sup> But this does nothing to the *concepts* themselves, because we still can give partial, more or less adequate, descriptions of experienced things, classes of things, kinds of things – the *cuts* in the experience are there as they have been all the time, and so are the *signs* with their power to bring such *cuts* into the *horizon of actuality*.

### 1.2.2.i. Concepts vs. impressions

Understanding a *concept* may be, psychologically, very different from being in a *mood*, or having an *impression*. But it is only a psychological difference. *Moods*, *concepts*, *impressions* – all are modes of understanding, for to understand something is to know its limits. We never know these limits precisely, but that granted, understanding ‘Prague’ is to know, more or less, where it ends and ceases to be Prague, or else, what makes Prague different from Paris, just like feeling irritation is not to feel tranquility or pleasure – more abstractly, it is to know, more or less, where ‘irritation’ ceases (or begins) to be one. Likewise, to understand the mathematical concept of a group is to be able to recognise what is a group and what is not, is to be able to distinguish it from a monoid and from a field. In either case, it is *experience*, the texture of the wider context of *distinctions* which determines the adequacy, determinacy and, above all, understanding of the *concept* or, generally, of the *sign*. I understand the *sign X* when I know what it refers to, yes, but what it refers to is not (primarily) any positive ‘essence’ but simply the limits of its application. It is not a question about properties of any subjects and accidents of any substances but, simply, about what distinguishes the *complex X* from others, where *X* begins (and ceases) to be itself.

As we observed in I:§§58.ff, *signs* denote *distinctions* and not only *objective* entities in the physical world. *Moods* and *thoughts* introduce limits of *distinctions* within the *horizon of actuality*, the *complexes* they address have the same scope, in fact, viewed as *externalised* contents may be the same things as those addressed by *concepts* and *thoughts*. The difference concerns the character of these *signs* – *concepts* point towards the multiplicity and *moods* towards the unity of the signified. *Concepts* dissolve the *non-actual* aspects into a multiplicity of *actual* determinations, *impressions* gather the *totality* of a *complex* into a one, unified *sign* which cannot be dissolved into components without changing the *impression*. This difference, often viewed as a tension between the two kinds of *signs*, is merely a difference of emphasis and does not affect the fact that both have essentially the same function of signifying *complexes*.

*Moods* seem ‘subjective’, only privately mine, while *concepts* are claimed to be ‘objective’ or, at least, public and shared. As most claims within this dualism, this one means close to nothing and sounds as plausible, as it is misleading.

The *reflectively dissociated* elements, the minute distinctions which can be pointed to and even captured by *actual* definitions are most easily communicable. And *concepts* are built upon such *distinctions*; they are designed not to be public or communicable, but to be *easily* communicable. ‘Subjective’ *impressions*, on the other hand, capture the unity of a situation in a way which is solidly anchored in the background of the person experiencing it – they *reflect* the situation as much as the person. (A person with an obsessive fear of revealing his privacy might experience our detective as a persecutor, while one with a purely social interests as a bothering snob.) But they are not therefore private and incommunicable. (After all, we *all* got the *impression* of a detective.) They announce the (limits of) *distinctions* made in the experience, and this eventually means, in the *one*. As such they are accessible, at least in principle, to everybody.<sup>37</sup> With respect to feelings and *moods*, one speaks perhaps about ‘empathy’ or ‘sympathy’. Although many people have limited capacities in this respect, this may be because feeling *exactly the same* as another person, is a rather futile attempt to overcome one’s sense of alienated subjectivism. But if one is unable to recognise what another person is feeling, and one is unable to do so *in principle*, then one should have one’s psychology and emotional constitution looked at. All people have, at least in principle, the capacity to face the same situation, to address the same (limits of) *distinctions*. What matters is that one relates to (roughly) the same *totality* of a situation, which involves also

<sup>36</sup>A. Tarski, *The semantical conception of truth*. II:18

<sup>37</sup>“Human emotions are to a large extent socially objectified, and not subjective. Only a part of emotional life is subjective and individual. Human thinking can be very subjective and often is so; thinking can be more individual than emotions, it depends less on the social objectification [...] Currently, one admits more and more often that there exist emotional apprehension [*Erkenntnis*]. It was claimed by Pascal, Scheler, and was emphasized by Keyserling.” [N. Berdyaev, *I and the world of objects*. I:1]

the reactions and feelings of other persons, and *sharing* another's feelings is, at bottom, no different from *sharing* his situation and problems. Whether one does it using one's emotional intelligence rather than distanced reflection is of no significance as long as the results are (roughly) of the same character. It is only by reducing feelings and *moods* to their affective aspect, to the mere fact of 'affecting me here and now' and, on the other hand, imagining *concepts* as some eternal 'essences', that distribution of the dissociated labels 'subjective', respectively, 'objective' may have some appeal. But statements like "It is sunny" or "Two plus two is four" communicate exactly as much as "I am feeling depressed" or "I had a bad day". They communicate the meaning which, when understood, is *shared* by the participants of the communication. In fact, the communicated statements are understood only because something is already *shared*, and the actual utterances only *actualise* something of the *shared* horizon. The meaning, of course, is different in each (pair) of the cases, but this does not impair the possibility of communicating and *sharing* the *moods* just as one can share the *objective* contents of observation statements.<sup>38</sup>

Having different feelings in a given situation is just like having different understanding of this situation. Incapacity of some persons to *share* the feelings of others witnesses to the 'subjectivity' of feelings as much as the incapacity of some persons to understand the *concepts* understood by others witnesses to the 'subjectivity' of *concepts*. There is also this final characteristic of understanding in general, and *conceptual* understanding in particular. It amounts to knowing the limits. As we said, not in the sense of knowing precisely where the border between *X* and *Y* goes (which is an illusory ideal), but only in the sense of recognising *X* as the focal point, the center excluding everything which is not *X*. The *distinction* of *X*, drawing its limits, is not voluntarily determined by one's wish or arbitrary caprice. Yet, it is relative to the existence drawing this limit and here lies the aspect of freedom, or in any case of some indeterminacy. Where to draw the limit? Does Earth really, in fact, move or not? Of course, we know that it does, yet living on Earth we will never stop seeing the sun *rising* above the resting horizon and *moving* across the sky over the immovable surface of our planet. *Concepts* change over time; a *concept* as if evolves, centering perhaps all the time around the same basic intuition, but changing its place in relation to other *concepts* and even the borders separating it from others. There is a discernible line which goes from the basic idea of weight of a daily object, through the fact that air too has some weight, through the Newtonian mass, to the relativistic mass. Yet the actual *concepts* are in all cases different, even if vaguely related. One might ask if we then deal with the same *concept* or different ones, but we leave quibbling to the quibblers. For the most, *concepts* do not have any unique and precise boundaries and where such boundaries are set may depend on the historical situation, on the social context and even on the individual user. In this respect, if *concepts* differ from feelings, it is because they change during the history to the degree which it would be hard to discern in the emotional and spiritual complexion of the humans.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup>We will say more about *sharing* in III.3.3.3. §§121. ff; here we only wanted to signal the fact that assumed 'subjectivity' of feelings and *moods*, relating eventually, as everything else, to the *indistinct one*, is not so totally 'subjective' after all.

<sup>39</sup>We can refer to S. Toulmin, *Human Understanding...* for a general theory of concepts as evolutionary entities. Yet one may feel that this is stretching the point too far. At least the mathematical concepts do not depend so on extra-mathematical circumstances. In a sense, we agree, and we will return to this sense in the last section of this Book. Consider, however, "[t]he concept 'trisection of an angle with ruler and compass', when people are trying to do it, and, on the other hand, when it has been proved that there is no such thing." [L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:334] The fact that, say, the concept of a group has become what it is (a non-empty set *X*, closed under a total binary function  $\_ \cdot \_$ , which is associative,  $\forall x, y, z \in X : x \cdot (y \cdot z) = (x \cdot y) \cdot z$ , has an identity element 1 such that  $\forall x : 1 \cdot x = x \cdot 1 = x$ , and inverse  $\_^{-}$  such that  $\forall x \in X : x \cdot x^{-} = x^{-} \cdot x = 1$ ) was a matter of development. Just a few examples from a long list of variations attempted in the history. Ruffini considered (around 1799) only groups of permutations and used explicitly only the property of closure (the other properties hold for permutations 'automatically'); Galois used (in 1831-32) the group properties extensively without ever defining the concept; Cayley introduced (in 1854) a collection of operators (on another set) which were closed under associative composition, had an identity and inverse. Intuitions point unmistakably in the same direction but did they all have the same concept, and if so, was it the same concept as we have today? (Permutation groups are, after all, only a special case of the general concept (even if the crucial one, since every finite group can be represented as such a one). Cayley's requirements are almost the modern axioms, but his definition applied to a collection of operators over some other set.) If one feels tempted to answer yes, one should better consider that, for instance, non-zero rationals with multiplication form a group so, perhaps, the concept was known to the ancient Greeks...? The mathematical adventure has led to drawing just these, and not other, division lines (choosing just these, and not other, axioms.) This terminus became abstracted and posited as a new entity, a new object of possible study. *This entity* did not actually exist earlier in the mathematical world, it 'was there' only as a *virtual* possibility of being distinguished. And so 'were there' all the variations which ended up as special cases or failed approximations, as

Emphasizing the importance of the *original signs*, we were not trying to repeat the analyses 33. of Gestalt psychology of perception which, although certainly applicable in many cases, are not universal. Neither were we trying to postulate that every *impression* is accompanied by the actual thought of its *complex*. The two represent only different modes of presentation but, although addressing the same *complexes*, need not go in any pairs. In particular, a *complex* may also enter the *horizon of actuality* after its aspects have been seen, analysed, contemplated – experienced. In the epistemological tradition underlied by the image of ultimate ‘atoms’, this has in fact been the only possibility: abstraction (of higher concepts from instances), induction (of general laws from special cases), deduction (of consequences from given axioms), construction (of complex structures from simple atoms) are all variations on this theme, and we will not add any more for rather obvious reasons. But the same possibility of a unifying *sign* arising after various aspects of the corresponding *complex* applies also in the case of *impressions*.

Entering a room, I need not get immediately any general *impression*. I may have none and get one first after being in this room for a while, after having discovered different aspects and objects collected there which, together, build up a unified *impression* of the whole. Looking for a way in a foreign city, I can be forced to stop at each cross and ask for directions, I may consult the city’s plan, etc. Eventually, I find the way. The next day I may still have difficulties but the intermissions won’t be that frequent. After a few times I know the way ‘by heart’, I have it as a one entity, given to me in a single moment not with all its details but with the clarity of the single *sign*: “I know the way.” I have ‘built a totality’. Sure, to begin with I might have had a mere idea of this way from my hotel to the restaurant but now I have an *experience* of it. Shall we call it a “concept” of this way? An “impression”? An “understanding”? We will leave quarrels about that to those who find them worthwhile.

A good example of a *concept* emerging after the experiences of its parts involves reasoning, for instance, understanding a mathematical definition. To begin with, I have to work my way through the notation, then through the other concepts applied, then their interrelations, finally, its implications and relations to other definitions. Then I may understand it but it is not the same as ‘getting it’. To ‘get it’, I have to grasp the whole in one act – of intuition, inner perception, call it as you like – which gives me perhaps a wrong *impression* of certainty that, even if I do not know all possible implications and applications of the definition, I know *how* it possibly can be used, that is, where it can not be used. ‘Getting it’ is an *impression* of several things falling on their place, of having understood, which accompanies acquisition of a *concept*. It is not, of course, the *impression* corresponding to (the same *complex* as) the *concept* itself. The latter may be a more subtle matter. Developing understanding of some field, one develops also … intuition. And that not only in the vague and general but also in the quite technical sense of that mode which “relates immediately to the object, and is single. [...] In whatsoever mode, or by whatsoever means, our knowledge may relate to objects, it is at least quite clear that the only manner in which it immediately relates to them is by means of an intuition.”<sup>40</sup> This kind of intuition comes very close to what we mean by an *impression*, a unified *sign* of a *complex*. And it arises when “[a]t the end of a certain time ordinary meditation produces what is called acquired contemplation, which consists in seeing at a simple glance the truths which could previously be discovered only through prolonged discourse.”<sup>41</sup> All reflective efforts are guided by the search for such a unifying intuition – but “for the intellect, the unity remains only a postulate, an act of faith.”<sup>42</sup>

Concepts, being events of reflective experience, and even of attentive reflection, like to have 34. a precise foundation, a basis of some primitives from which more complicated concepts could be built. Concepts are built bottom-up, either by construction or by abstraction, from initial ‘givens’, like ‘substances’ or rather their conceptual counterparts, ‘essences’.

For us, abstraction is a secondary function of reflection which, starting with the objective limits of *distinctions*, extracts from them some ‘features’, general ‘properties’ which, indeed, are observed only in the objectified particular things. As Abelard, repeating Aristotle, points out,

---

well as all those which still ‘are there’.

<sup>40</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. A320/B377-A19/B33 [Without, of course, agreeing to the Kantian limitation of intuition to sensuous perception.]

<sup>41</sup>Although the passage refers to the development of spiritual insight, it is obviously applicable. The quotation is from St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Homo apostolicus* Appendix I:7.

<sup>42</sup>I:footnote 137.

“The understanding considers separately by abstraction, but does not consider as separated [...]”<sup>43</sup> We would say: *distinctions* are not *dissociations*. One might perhaps quote Hegel saying that a *distinction* is an abstraction from the *indistinct*, but this would only confuse the language. The difference is that *distinctions* are primary and abstraction secondary: abstraction must start from somewhere, and it believes to start from some basic, ‘atomic givens’. Only the primordial *distinctions*, and the reflective *dissociations* in particular, provide this very ground from which abstraction may possibly start.

Any *distinctions* can be refined, and so no eventual substances are to be found. As *concepts* mean only what they refer to, so even trying to establish ‘positive essences’, no such things as primitive, basic *concepts* are to be expected. *Distinctions* may introduce apparent universals before one has accumulated enough ‘substantialised’ instances to perform any abstraction. As phenomenologists say, induction is not necessary and often it may be sufficient to encounter one single instance of a phenomenon, to perceive its essential (universal) aspects. Yet this apparent universal, like everything else, may be eventually confronted with further differentiation. A person may acquire the concept ‘BC’ without understanding what ‘B’ and ‘C’ are. For the sake of example, let us take ‘B’ to be ‘brown’ and ‘C’ to be ‘cat’. A child growing up with only one (or more) ‘BC’s, but with no ‘B’s nor ‘C’s, may perhaps learn to distinguish ‘BC’s from ‘ZY’s, even have a word “bc”, without ever getting the idea of dissociating ‘B’ from ‘C’. But meeting ‘BD’ (brown dogs?), may easily give rise to the emergence of separate concepts – of *dissociation* of – ‘B’ and ‘C’. As long as ‘B’ and ‘C’ appear only in ‘BC’ they may be, to some degree, recognised but they are not (necessarily) *dissociated*. What happened with ‘BC’, can now happen to ‘B’ and ‘C’, which remain ‘primitive’ only as long as further *distinctions* are not drawn.

We are not saying that, in practice, one must not built conceptual constructions from some basis of primitives determined in one way or another. This is the only way to make any conceptual constructions. But such constructions proceed only upwards from earlier *dissociated* pieces and hence will never reach any bottom which they must, in fact, always presuppose. To put it trivially, *reflection* can never capture experience. There are no metaphysically ultimate ‘atoms’ from which reflection could once and for all reconstruct the whole world as it is ‘in itself’. But also, every reflective project must needs start from some basis, from some ‘givens’. These two facts not only are not contradictory but do not imply any scepticism either. It is exactly the tension between them which harbours all the *concreteness* of which *reflection* is capable.

### 35. *Universals*

We were trying to point out the analogies, rather than the differences, between *moods* and *concepts*: they have the same temporal scope; addressing *complexes*, they move in the tension between the unity of a *sign* and the multiplicity of the aspects and properties of the *complex*; we have emphasized the communicability of *moods*, if not an irresolvable association so at least complementarity of *concepts* and *moods*, and the fact that not only *impressions*, but also *concepts* come in various degrees of *precision*. Eventually, the difference between the two turns out to be the difference of tendency and degree: *concepts* dissociate striving for mathematical *precision*, while *moods* keep the *complexes* in a vague – but clear – unity.

This, however, is hardly the whole difference! Isn’t it so that *concepts* are (composed of) universals “and by the universal we mean that which is predicate of the individuals”<sup>44</sup>, that which “is common, since that is called universal which is such as to belong to more than one thing.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, it is that which can be *known* about particular, it is “implicit in the clearly known particular.”<sup>46</sup> *Impressions*, on the other hand, are particular and unique, and certainly not known with the precision with which universals constituting essences can be known.

This isn’t exactly so. This opposition reflects indubitable psychological difference but also (perhaps by the same token) the source of ambiguities inherent in Aristotelian and post-Aristotelian metaphysics: the division into individuals and non-individuals which is supposed to apply ‘objectively’ not only to living beings but also to material *distinctions*, things and their properties. The *dissociation* into atomic, ‘substantial’ entities, existing each completely on its own, makes any connection between them at best secondary, and at worst unreal. These two positions with

<sup>43</sup>The Glosses of Peter Abailard on Porphyry, translated by R. McKeon, in Selections from Medieval Philosophers I;p.219 [Scribner’s, New York, 1920] [in Jones, The Medieval Mind;p.194]

<sup>44</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. III:4

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. VII:13

<sup>46</sup>Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*. I:1

respect to universals – considering them either as secondary or as completely unreal – seem the only possible once we assume the ontology of particular ‘substances’.

First, concerning the opposition to feelings and *moods*, there is what we just said in §32 about 36. the possibility of *sharing* them. Then, I can have a concept of some *impression*, say a concept of irritation. Probably, it will be only the *sign*, the word which comes to my mind whenever I experience irritation, but it may be more. But even if I do not have such a concept, I still can experience the same irritation on different occasions, I can recognise the feeling I am having now as the same I had before. Yeah, this looks like a kind of ‘private language’. The word “language” here is bad, but “private” and “recognisable” are definitely on the proper place. The worrying phrase is, of course, “the same”, but then remember that we are not talking about any ‘essences’ reappearing in new instantiations at completely dissociated points of time. We are talking about *cuts* from the continuity of experience, eventually, from the *indistinct*. A ‘new instance’ of irritation does not appear from nothing to get re-cognised and connected to some old and merely remembered instance. It enters the *horizon of actuality* through the levels of gradual *dissociation* from some *nexus* which constitutes its ‘relatedness’ to a whole field of other, possibly also *actual experiences*. This *nexus* involves more *virtual traces* and various *actual experiences* emerge as ‘instances’ of the same because they arise from the same *nexus* and pass through the same traces on their way toward *actualisation*. ‘Identity’ of one ‘instance’ of irritation and another is constituted *before* they get actually ‘instantiated’. This is all we can answer to the question “How can I be certain that it is the same irritation as before?” – the two are indistinguishable in their *virtual source* and the only difference concerns the two *actual manifestations*, appearance at two different moments. One should not confuse an *impression* with an *actual ‘instance’ of the impression*, the whole *trace* on which the *nexus* of some *impression* resides with a particular situation where the *impression* is experienced.

True, conceptual universals may be arrived at by abstraction, which means, their relation to the particulars they subsume will be much more *precise* and *visible*. But to the extent they are not mere *reflective constructions*, they will also *reflect* some *distinctions* which *cut* the experience beyond any possible *actuality*.

Anything that is is a *distinction* or a limit thereof, a *cut* from experience. And every *cut* is unique: 37. what it *cuts out* is not *cut out* by any other *cut*. A *cut* is just that which it *cuts*. Certainly, “it is impossible to abstract universals from the singular without previous knowledge of the singular”<sup>47</sup> but it is only the traditional reduction of ‘reality’ to *actuality* which forces one to assume that universals arise only by abstraction, that to encounter ‘chair’ one has to first see several chairs.

- ! Concepts are abstract and universal. Universal, that is, they may have many particular instances, be encountered in different experiences.
- ? Recalling §9, at this moment, I wouldn’t be so comfortable with the word “particular” but let go. Is ‘Prague’ a universal? When I go around, I see this building and that corner, from the Old Town Square I do not see *Vyšehrad* and from below of *Vyšehrad* I do not see *Hradčany*.
- ! Yes, but still it is a particular thing, only “too big” to be seen all at once.
- ? It is too big and at each of these places I see a part of ‘Prague’, I have a different *actual experience* of Prague, something which, with enough of bad will, can be called “a particular instance” of ‘Prague’.
- ! No, you see different parts of a big city, you do not see *the same* universal exemplified in various particular places.
- ? OK, what I see of the ‘horse’ in this horse is exactly the same as what I see of it in another horse. But what I see of ‘this chair’ now is *the same* as what I saw of it yesterday. And do not tell me that it does not count because ‘this chair’ is a particular.
- ! It counts because you may have several distinct exemplifications of the same universal *simultaneously* and, furthermore, you may *always encounter more*. With this chair you cannot do the former – nor the latter if I burn it.
- ? What about ‘all my grannie’s chairs’? It seems, it looks more like a universal than like a particular. But they all are here – she has never had more than these four. And, besides,

<sup>47</sup>J. Duns Scotus, *De Anima*. 22:3 [This does go for many concepts formed by reflection in the process of abstraction – but this does not make it the fundamental characteristic of universals.]

she is dead, so you will never get new ones. If it is “my grannie” who annoys you here, then what about the dinosaurs? We have rather run out of the possible new instances.

- ! Forget new instances; a universal is universal even if no instances exist.
- ? Have you turned extreme realist in this matter? But tell me first what they are.
- ! Take “abstract” – a universal is not an independent being, it is always only an aspect of a particular.
- ? You have just said that it need no particular instances... So, after all, the ‘chair’ (or the ‘dinosaur’) is not universal?
- ! It is, but it is what is common to many chairs, what can be predicated equally of many particulars.
- ? By ‘common’ you mean, probably, something like a stereotype, a paradigmatic instance, or just the ‘essence’ – but we know that these won’t quite do. But who are these particulars? And isn’t ‘Prague’ the same at this particular Vyšehrad and at this particular *Hradčany*?
- ! It is, but ‘Prague’ is not *predicated* about them.
- ? Really? One does predicate “praski” about this particular *Hrad* and this particular *Vyšehrad*. But even if one didn’t. So it would be just a matter of how we use the language? If I say “This city is exactly like Prague while that one is not.” will it do?
- ! Of course, not. First you use “Prague” as a name of a particular city; then you use it as a ...
- ? Predicate? A concept? Then, does it mean that I can pick any particular (reference) and turn it into a (predicable) concept? And what is the difference, except for the purely grammatical one, between ‘Prague’ used in the first and in the second way?
- ! Predicating ‘Prague’ of another city, you are really predicating some universal which is implicit in Prague and which you also find in this other city.
- ? Perhaps, but then one should tell me what universal it is. As far as I am concerned, Prague has a very specific character and atmosphere, indistinguishable from its uniqueness, which can hardly be characterised better than “Prague-like” and which can be in various forms or degrees found at some other places.
- etc., etc., ...

38. Being brought on a visit, at the age of two, to Prague I did not acquire any *concept* ‘Prague’. But I certainly *experienced* something. On later visits I could gather all the variety of views and impressions of the city under the common name “Prague”. Yes! ‘Prague’ is a *concept*; as good as any other – it is a *sign* unifying a variety of experiences and, if one insists, *objective* facts, into a totality of one *complex*. ‘Conceptually’ it is, perhaps, a very poor *concept*, but it still can be predicated about other elements of experience. With such a generous understanding of a *concept*, we are not interested in possible distinctions between various kinds of *concepts*. Such *distinctions* will be but distinctions concerning *what* I may have a *concept of*. Certainly there is a huge difference between the *concept* ‘Prague’, ‘bird’ and ‘prime number’. But there is nothing inherently *conceptual* about this differences – it is but the difference of content, the difference between Prague, birds, prime numbers. *Concepts* are meanings, *distinctions* which can be *actualised* enough to be grasped and understood in the unity of one act. Now, as to the universals:

39. *Universals are the non-actual things of experience, the cuts through the experience exceeding the horizon of actuality.*

As *non-actuals*, universals appear first of all as non-individuals. Characterising the individuals as whatever can be grasped within the *horizon of actuality*, their opposite become anything that *transcends* it. The relation between the *actual* and the *non-actual* is much more intimate than the bare opposition, but it reminds of a relativised (to the *existence*) version of the relation between particular substances and universals. ‘If they are universal, they will not be substances; for everything that is common indicates not a ‘this’ but a ‘such’, but substance is a ‘this’’<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. III:6

Universals are possible stations of *distinctions* which, sedimented into *signs*, allow then further *distinctions* providing, as one says, ‘particular instances’. But the primary difference, *the difference* which counts is only that between the possibility of an *experienced completeness*, of being given within the *horizon of actuality* versus the experience of its factual (or even essential) *non-actual*ity. With respect to the *horizon of actuality*, the whole Prague, Europe, irritation, my life are as much outside of it as the assumed universals. All that can appear within this *horizon* are their respective *signs*.

The problems with the status of universals are encountered with respect to individuals as the problems of their identity or their ‘substantiality’. The question what makes different occurrences of ‘blue’ or ‘chair’ instances *of the same* universal ‘blue’ or ‘chair’ is not really different from the question what accounts for the fact that the chair I see now is *the same as* the one I left here yesterday (or what is one in the experiences of Prague.) Once we have drawn a limit of *distinctions* around Prague, it has become one city and we may have thousands of experiences, all being experiences of Prague, all exemplifying this particular city in the same way as one chair exemplifies ‘chair’ or, perhaps, another chair. The one is the *sign*, the word “Prague”, “chair”. But these are not mere empty words, they refer back to the *cuts from experience* which, stretching far beyond the narrow scope of any particular *here-and-now*, terminate at some limit beyond the *horizon of actuality*. The ‘oneness’ has no accurate verbal definition, nobody can tell precisely where Prague begins and where it ends, what it *really* is, etc. Just like nobody can tell precisely what constitutes a ‘wave’ nor what the concept ‘chair’ is (when something I can sit on ceases to be a chair, acquires rockers or, perhaps, becomes a stump).

The impossibility of verbalising such ‘identities’ does not witness to the impossibility of attaining any knowledge of them but merely to the fact that linguistic, and then conceptual, *distinctions* do not exhaust the field of our knowing. I can distinguish a chair from a tree which should be enough to say that I know the difference between the two, even if I can not spell it out precisely and unambiguously. The assumed ‘essences’ play the crucial role in handling *concepts* and universals by reducing (or rather attempting to reduce) the *non-actual* things to purely *actual* aspects, just like the ‘substances’ justify the objectivistic illusion in its restriction to mere *actuality*, in reducing individual beings to the vanishing points.

The problems of the universals originate from the assumption that there are some definite particulars – some basic substances, independent, simple and indecomposable and, moreover, that such particulars are the only genuine objects of experience; in short, from the reduction of experience to *actuality*. This assumption is inseparable from the less desirable one, namely, that experience consists of some isolated points, ‘nows’, strangely and always inexplicably succeeding each other. But *actual experiences* and things which can be experienced within the *horizon of actuality*, which can be made *actual objects* of attention, are interwoven into the continuous texture of experience, are only its *actual reflections*. Encountering ‘a new instance of a universal’ may be a new *actual* experience. But this is not ‘added’ to the rest of experience, as a new item to a collection – it is rather subtracted, for it has emerged as an *actual experience from experience*. 40.

What do we encounter the first time we see a cup? ‘This cup’ or ‘a cup’? I guess, *both* for there is no reason to draw any such distinction. Having both means that we have neither, neither particular nor universal, just ‘cup’ (or, perhaps, a special ‘this’). Encountering the same cup for the second time, it is not added to the earlier ‘cup’ – it is subtracted from it (and, sure, it is also subtracted from all the rest, but it emerges from the horizon through the trace whose last point is this earlier ‘cup’.) This subtraction establishes simultaneously *both* the universal ‘cup’ and its two particular instances. As a matter of fact, we still have not encountered ‘this cup’ or else, there is still no distinction between (the universal) ‘cup’ and ‘this cup’. (Such a distinction may arise when, for instance, somebody brings in a new cup and puts it next to our ‘cup’.) In the same manner, praski Hrad and Vyšehrad become *dissociated* from the same *trace* of Prague which, in turn, has been detached from my stay in Warsaw and from my whole experience.

The *reflective thinking* happens already within the assumed ontology of *dissociated* and *externalised objects*, and equally *dissociated* points of time. But when *my reflection* encounters something completely new and unexpected, when it ‘adds’ a new and some old instances, performing the abstraction of, say, ‘Prague’ or the common nature ‘cup’, these have already been distinguished as unities *before and above* this *reflective act*. The *reflectively new* and unexpected has emerged from some *trace* in the process which is performed in my *experience* (in my body,

my perceptual mechanism, my brain, or wherever one wants to look for it) and of which *reflection* only finds final results. Every new cup is not added to but is *distinguished* from the same *trace* as, for one reason or another, a new entity. To emerge as distinct, the two must have first been the same. When *I* notice a new cup and ‘associate’ it with an earlier one, this is only a conscious or subconscious *reflection* of the process which has already *dissociated* the two from the same origin. Eventually, everything emerges from the one and the same *indistinct*, everything is one before it becomes two. Of course, once such *dissociations* have been established and sedimented, ‘new instances’ of Prague, cup etc. can be encountered, that is, universals can start appearing as common features. But it is the *unity* of experience which *founds* the continuity in the experience of the particulars as well as of the connections between various instances of universals, in short, of the very possibility of *reflective ‘association’*.

Universals, and more generally *non-actual* things, witness thus to this *unity* of experience, *founding* also the very experience of particulars. Trying to get rid of the former, one ends up dissolving the latter as well, because both happen not only to mutually condition each other but also because both are underlined by the same principle of constitution: as the sedimented limits of *distinctions*, and particulars are but the *actual* limits of *traces* which *cut experience far above the horizon of actuality*.

The degree of similarity, or the character of what is common to many *actual* experiences, distinguishing the *non-actuality* of ‘Prague’ from that of ‘chair’ and from that of ‘this chair’ is only a difference of degree. *Concepts* are the *actual signs* of (often *non-actual*) things whose characteristics, whose repeating aspects are more prone to *actualisation*: it is easier to indicate (but still only indicate) what possibly might be included in – perhaps even exhaust! – the *concept ‘chair’* than the *concept ‘Prague’*. What connects one experience of Prague with another may be different from what connects one instance of ‘chair’ with another. But the fact that in the latter case this connection seems more organising and is based on *actually* identifiable similarities rather than some vaguely intuited emotional characteristics, or mere geography, is merely a quantitative difference of degree. Because the basis is not a connection which *reflection* has to establish between *dissociated actualities* but a *cut through experience*, a *cut given in experience beyond the horizon of actuality*.

41. *Positing* particular, most *actual* entities as the primordial ‘substances’, is based on the prior *reflective dissociation*. Abstracting activity of *concept construction* starts naturally from those basic entities which are most precisely grasped by the singular acts of *reflection*. The conflict between nominalism and conceptualism (viewing universals as conceptual abstractions) is played already on the ground of the ontology of particulars. The question concerns only to what extent particulars contain any reality beyond their particularity or ‘substantiality’. As such, both these views are opposed to the earlier realism which was willing to assign the universals independent reality. Our universals remind indeed closely of the independent forms which can exist – be *distinguished* – also before any particular instances are identified. But we never try to *dissociate* the different levels of experience – in this sense, once the *horizon of actuality* is established, no *non-actuality* can exist without and independently from it. A very limited space is left for conceptualism in that one can sometimes obtain new universal characteristics by abstraction, but abstraction accounts neither for their primary form nor for their eventual ontological status. Nominalism must rest satisfied with the fact that universals, just like all experienced *distinctions*, are relative to the *distinguishing existence*.

42. ***Eidos, noema and anamnesis***

Turning the tension between the fleeting *actuality* of particulars and the presence of universals into an opposition, then putting all kinds of *non-actuality* and *non-actuality* – concepts, universals, ideas, values, souls – into one sack of the ‘spiritual’ as opposed to the ‘material’ and, finally, recognising the effective reality of the spiritual, one will easily come up with some ‘unchangeable essences’ stored in an ‘ideal, intelligible world’. Roughness of this operation, also when seen in the light of attempts to provide a rational counterpart of mythology, opens too much space to be addressed in detail here. It infected the whole tradition with the ‘intelligible world of Ideas’ which, somehow, emerged ready-made from the original One or from God’s mind.<sup>49</sup> Thus predetermined

---

<sup>49</sup>The doctrine which made Forms/Ideas cease to live their own life and become concepts of the divine mind is present in Philo of Alexandria, Atticus, Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* IX,XIV. A. N. M. Rich, *The Platonic idea as thoughts of God* presents the history of the doctrine.

and fixed it hangs over *this world* as a static double – ‘intelligible’ only in empty postulates because, as a matter of fact, completely incomprehensible and in constant need of being somehow connected to *this world*.

*Anamnesis*, learning as recollection, arises easily from such a sublimation of *concepts* and their assumed ‘essences’ to the level of the immortal habitat of the soul. But Socrates’ *maieusis*, as exemplified in *Meno*, need no such speculative foundation. If reflection finds only the *distinctions* in the experience, then obviously what it finds has already been there – it is a *repetition*. The only thing one has to do is to identify soul with the *reflective precision*, rational explicitness, and call its emergence from *experience* into the *actuality* “birth”, to postulate that the soul knew these ideas before birth.

The questions which Socrates asks constitute the whole and essential element of getting the right answers from Meno’s slave. “To ask the right question is half the solution of the problem.” The questions involve the relevant *distinctions* of which the boy had been unaware, which he had not made (or not connected) before. The procedure might be pedagogically admirable but it proves nothing of what Plato would like to put into it. Being able to make the relevant *distinctions* and identifications is different from having actually made them – making them is precisely that: making *new distinctions*, getting *new insights*. That the boy is able to follow the geometric argument (yes – argument!) of Socrates shows simply that he is not entirely stupid, that he can recognise the *distinctions* and their relations suggested by Socrates. Finally, the possibility of a *distinction* being at all made is different from it actually having been made and stored ready in some ‘intelligible world’, ‘divine mind’, or whatever depot one manages to imagine.

Soul’s immortality remains as open an issue after the argument as it was before. However, we will not dismiss the Idea so easily. With all due respect to the spiritual inspirations – we will return to *anamnesis* in a more appropriate context, III:§64. Here we can observe that the distinction between Idea (*eidos*) and concept (*noema*)<sup>50</sup> could be interpreted as our distinction between the non-*actuals* arising in the primordial process of differentiation and universals (as well as *concepts*) which arise secondarily through all forms of *reflective abstraction* (generalisation, induction, construction). A *concept* is then a *concept of* the Idea, is a *reflective attempt* to repeat the (limit of) *experiential distinctions* as an *actual construction*. Such repetitive character of concepts and explicit understanding would square well with the postulates that Ideas are perfect exemplars to be merely imitated by the *actual things*. But the value of such repetitions becomes the more dubious the deeper and more personal/spiritual issues they try to capture. We hardly have any precise Ideas of justice, goodness or beauty to be merely imitated. This other property of Ideas – most clearly seen in the used examples – namely, that of being lofty and vague generalities, comes closer to our *virtuality*. In this sense, Idea would correspond to a *virtual nexus* which is not so much imitated as simply *actualised* by the things and *concepts*. Even if one might still say that such an *actual concept* is *of* the respective Idea, the “*of*” has a very different meaning than in the previous case. In either case, Aristotle’s critique of Plato, amounting to replacing Ideas by mere *concepts*, was possible because the two were not sufficiently distinguished. Unfortunately, the replacement amounted to a simple reduction. The tradition attempting to reconcile the two masters, has tried to correct this unfortunate replacement maintaining both elements of the distinction, albeit in various forms and often only as a distinction between two kinds of concepts.<sup>51</sup> We do not contest the reality (nor significance, nor creative potential, nor technological relevance) of this ‘Aristotelian’ thread but only its primacy, not to mention, exclusiveness.

---

<sup>50</sup>Suggested by Socrates in response to the ‘third-man regress argument’. For “may not the ideas, asked Socrates, be thoughts [concept,*noema*] only, and have no proper existence except in our minds?” [Plato, *Parmenides*.] The received interpretation of the passage is, however, that it eventually rejects the view since “The thought must be of something” and “something which is apprehended as one and the same in all, [will] be an idea”. No matter what Plato’s eventual view might have been, one could find in his writings grounds for this distinction which were to acquire much importance.

<sup>51</sup>Plotinus, for instance, views the concepts (our original universals) as a kind of ‘impressions’ received from the Intellect and thus distinct from those received from the senses (for which we would have to substitute all secondary abstractions). The soul comprehends “the impressions, superior and inferior”: “The reasoning-principle in the Soul acts upon the representations standing before it as the result of sense-perception; these it judges, combining, distinguishing: or it may also observe the impressions, so to speak, rising from the Intellectual-Principle, and has the same power of handling these; and reasoning will develop to wisdom where it recognises the new and late-coming impressions [those of sense] and adapts them, so to speak, to those it holds from long before – the act which may be described as the soul’s Reminiscence.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:3.2] The history and examples of the issue are reviewed in L. P. Gerson, *Traditions of Platonism*.

### 1.2.3. Ego, body, action, control

43. The kind of *complexes* I am able to relate to, their character and degree of complexity is relative to my skills – skills to differentiate and, at the same time, to *re-cognise* the interplay of various aspect within one totality. Unlike bare *objects*, *complexes* are not relative to my mere presence, but to my shrewdness, intelligence, my skill to see the connections; also to my capacity of compassion and sympathy, of predicting other's way of thinking and acting, etc.

What is a *complex* for one person need not be so for another. Having more or less the same organs of perception and, at least at the lowest level, similar capacities for discrimination, we typically agree on the status of single, even if complex, things and *objects*. But many of these things may not even exist for a bat, whose perception mechanisms will doom irrelevant many things we distinguish from each other. On the other hand, a dog's smell will differentiate things and situations which, for us, may seem completely homogeneous. Different humans may, similarly, have different abilities of forming and connecting *complexes* which, to some extent, are smoothed by functioning in a linguistic community where words establish much of inter-subjective agreement on a host of *distinctions*.

The same applies for skills at all levels. For a professor of algebra, the rings are quite different things from groups; a student may, to begin with, have problems with seeing that these are two different *complexes*; an illiterate may not even understand that one is talking about anything meaningful.

In short, the complexity of the world one lives and acts in, the complexity of *complexes* one relates to is the reflection of the *complex* of one's skills and abilities which we call "ego".

44. *Ego* is the aspect of a person which can be reduced to *actual* expressions and described in *actual* terms. It reminds a bit of Jung's 'persona' as opposed to 'person', in so far as 'persona' is a *totality* of externalised properties, comparable to the similar properties of others and observable within the *horizon of actuality*. The inquisitive attitude of the guy from the pub who became 'the detective' belongs to his *ego*. (The trace may, of course, go deeper.) *Ego* is the first object encountered by a simple, teenager's form of self-reflection. It does not address being or, if it does, it does so only indirectly. It is primarily occupied with the facts that *I am so-and-so*. "I have too round face.", "I have too light hair.", "I won't wear this – what would others think?". Such worries pass quickly into slightly more fundamental ones, marking the crisis of adolescence, which, nevertheless, still carry the egotic character: "I am not as good as he is." "I am insensitive." "I am stupid."

Such characteristics and self-characteristics, genuine and honest as they may happen to be, consist of objectified attributes which get attached to their noumenal subject as some *external* properties. *Ego*, we could say, is oneself viewed from 'outside', which often amounts to viewing oneself with other's eyes. But even when others are not invoked, *ego* is still 'outside' oneself: any predicate involves, at least implicitly, a comparison and, moreover, it happens only to be some *actually* observable fact which never manages to reach the intended 'essence' of one's person.

The non-*actuality* of a *complex* is of the same kind as the non-*actuality* of *ego*. It is not *essential non-actuality* but only non-*actuality* of something which might, or even was, *actual* at some other time. *Ego* is a person filtered through the *actualising sieve of reflection*. "The *Ego* never appears except on the occasion of a reflective act."<sup>52</sup> And it appears always 'as' – confused, smart, late, amiable... *Ego* signifies a *complex* of properties, features, facts each of which, taken separately, may be perfectly *actual*. *Ego* is such a *complex* of features, skills, ways of behaviour, etc. which one attributes to a person. It constitutes the subjective pole of *actual experiences of complexes*. "The *Ego* is the unity of states and actions – optionally, of qualities."<sup>53</sup> *Ego* is the 'ideal' unity (*posited* and never experienced) of skills, abilities, qualities and actions. The unity of *ego* is only 'ideal' because it is *founded* in the deeper layer of *myself*.

45. Besides skills and abilities, the fundamental aspect of *ego* is the body. The *original signs of actuality* are often relative to the body. "It is nice" does not refer the feeling to a particular organ (even if it emerges there) but to the whole body which "feels nice". On the other hand, it is not relative to the *I*. Even if we might say "I feel nice", it is only a feeling *I have*, not something *I am*. (Contrary to the case when saying "I am nice".)

<sup>52</sup>J.-P. Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*. p.53; Sartre has "I" and not "Ego" here.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid. p.61

Thus body, although most intimately *mine*, appears for reflective attention as foreign, as external as all the contents of the ego – impersonal. More generally, all the signs of actuality are relative to such an impersonal feeling of vitality, of life – it is not so much *my* life, as life in general, even if it is actually my experience. The mood of vigor and vital strength is the feeling of ‘*my life*’ rather than of ‘*my life*’. Vital feelings signal flow or ebb, increase or decrease of life energy, and it is this life energy, seated and felt deeply in the body, which is their primary correlate.

The horizon of actuality is marked by my body and if we were to play the games with words, we 46. could say: body is the sign of the horizon of actuality. Body anchors me solidly in the actuality and, by this very token, encircles the horizon of my action. The horizon of action can be taken as synonymous with the horizon of actuality. Action is not merely an act, an immediate reflex or other minute movement – of body or mind – consummated in a single moment. Action unfolds in the entirety of the horizon of actuality, it addresses all, or several of the actual aspects. From the point of view of attentive reflection we may always say that action consists of a series of acts but one can equally well say the opposite: an act is an aspect of an action (unless, it is entirely spontaneous, that is mad, outburst unrelated to anything in its vicinity).

A single object is a correlate of an act. Similarly a sign of a complex, is a correlate of a single act. However, a complex itself isn’t merely a correlate of a single act. It may be a correlate of an action, I can manipulate it, act upon it for a specific purpose, I can think and reason about it, assemble or disassemble it, in short, bring it under my control. Objects are under my control only to the degree to which they are parts of complexes. Object itself, as a purely immediate given of consciousness, and considered only as such, appears in a somehow impulsive fashion, §16. It emerges for no apparent reason, *ex nihilo* and, as such, offers consciousness only a simple, immediate alternative of yes-no, take-avoid, accept-reject. Although object is used as a paradigm of the controllable, taken in itself, it is not. It becomes so only when seen in the broader context of visibility, when it is seen as a complex or part of a complex.

Just like sensations, limited to the immediacy, involve the responsive attitude choosing between the bare alternative of pleasant/unpleasant, yes/no, so do impressions and moods involve immediately a response. Their unifying role is not only that they present us with a totality rather than its parts, but that this presentation involves at the same time a reaction. Fear can be felt before its object is recognised, the source of satisfaction or irritation may remain unknown even when the impressions are felt clearly and intensely. Often, though not always, the reaction precedes recognition of its reason. To the extent the complexes are also given, moods and impressions disclose them through the unified signs which, at the same time, are one’s reactions to them. “When I use the word ‘feeling’ in contrast to ‘thinking’, I refer to a judgment of value – for instance, agreeable or disagreeable, good or bad, and so on.”<sup>54</sup>

Concepts, unlike impressions, lack this immediate reactive aspect. Emphasizing the complexity 47. of the complexes, they increase their dissociation, increase their isolation and, consequently, indifference. At the same time, however, the resulting externalisation of distinct aspects offers us the possibility of manipulation and control. It is typical that what one requires from a concept, and why one prizes it as something higher or better than an impression, is the more precise differentiation of its components and their relations. Unambiguous precision – the mark of instantaneous immediacy – founds the possibility of control, but is not yet synonymous with it. The crudest form of control, brutal physical force, conforms to this claim in that it can only be exercised on the actual objects in the immediate reach. Precision is the result of distinguishing brought to the limits of actuality, into the closest possible vicinity, into the immediacy. Its eventual goal, in the whole of philosophical tradition, has been to remove the distinction between the sign and the signified.

Control is most naturally associated with the intellect, its source being the dissociating and externalising effects of reflection. The control – and this involves also some purposefulness – requires individual objects to be dissociated and available for rearrangement. But it arises only with the multiplicity of objects, when they are included in a complex assigning to each its place and goal. This dissociation is exactly the aspect which moods and impressions lack and thus, although addressing the same complexes, they end up at the opposite end to thoughts and reasonings. Eventually, also the control of reason over emotions amounts to approaching a complex through

---

<sup>54</sup>C. G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, eds., *Man and His Symbols*. I;p.49

its complexity rather than unity. But as one should know very well, such a control is seldom as easy as control of the single objects. That is, control is the easier, the less complicated, the more minutely determined complex it tries to control. A single cup is in my complete power in that I can, at any given moment simply smash it. It would not, however, be so easily controllable if I wanted to change its painting or shape, which would require viewing it as a rather complicated complex. Likewise, lower emotional phenomena like sensual lust or even pain, can be controlled by the will, that is, by reflection, to quite a high degree. Often a mere change of the focus of attention can eliminate them. Moods and emotions, on the other hand, arisen by and making present much more complex situations, require much more analysis which only seldom brings about the results which could satisfy a true stoic.

#### 1.2.4. Transcendence

48. A complex, emerging within the *horizon of actuality*, appears as a single object which, in addition, consists of parts and properties which themselves can be seen as objects. As an object, it appears as external – it is not me.<sup>55</sup> But its transcendence is not exhausted by the simple externality. An object may suddenly reveal a new side which, as long as I merely focused on its mere fact of being there, remained hidden. A complex typically is accompanied by the sense of its inexhaustibility, its unlimited and non-actualisable potential of disclosing ever new sides. With it, we are thus also aware of the difference between the *actual sign* and its correlate; they do not coincide. Perceiving a house as a complex, I see its front but I also know that it has a back-side. I know it, that is, it is a part of the experienced totality. Yet, these two aspects are not present in the same way, and I am aware of this difference: I know that there is more to the house than what I am actually seeing of it. In the same way, even if I see the whole room at once, I know that I do not see all its aspects equally well. Some are sharper, some dimmer, some are closer, some further away. And the same again with a definition: I grasp the defined concept, I have it in front of my eyes in its intuitive totality, but I know that I do not actualise all the details, that its complexity exceeds the *horizon of actuality*, that it has a potential which can be used or explained only through a lengthy labour. The transcendence of a complex involves thus the more which is merely indicated by the *actual sign*. This more is not, in itself, anything qualitatively different. It consists of objects and complexes of other, possible or past, experiences.

*The more of a complex is other complexes.*

The difference between the complex and its more concerns only the way of appearance – the former is *actual* and the latter can be, but is not now. The more is not essential *non-actuality* but only something which, accidentally, happens not to be *actual* now. This quantitative more constitutes the horizontal aspect of the transcendence of complexes. It may be more of the same complex which is not *actual* at the moment, or it may be more complexes to which the *actual* one refers along some among the infinity of possible relations: as its cause or effect, as its predecessor or successor, as its part or whole to which it belongs, as its motivation or purpose. No matter how far one follows this dimension of transcendence, one never encounters anything but more complexes or more complex complexes. Eventually, one may reach the first or the second antinomy of pure reason, where thinking in terms of complexes and their relations must stop: there is nothing more left and to the extent we assume that there is, it can no longer serve us since its breadth and complexity make it inaccessible to the *actuality of reflection*, the finitude of reason.

49. The difference between the *actual sign* and the signified complex, the difference experienced now between the *actuality* and *non-actuality*, marks also the experience of temporality. The more of a complex, the surplus hiding behind its given surface is actually hiding in its temporality. This difference, appearing at the level of *actuality*, penetrates it thoroughly. All complexes are temporal in the sense that they emerge as unity of multiplicity, as *actual objects* which are not fully present, which have something more. They are temporarily ‘stretched’ and it is not merely one of their features but an indispensable aspect of their appearance as complexes.

The horizontal transcendence of a complex is thus not mere externality but more, which

---

<sup>55</sup> Everything we are saying here about complexes applies equally to the specific complex of ego. I am not my ego – I have it. It is also transcendent in the way all complexes are, in the way everything superficial or actually formalised is, as something foreign (even if mine) and irrelevant (even if practically significant).

involves also temporality stretching beyond *here-and-now*.

The *actuality* constitutes the vertical aspect of the *transcendence* with respect to the level of immediacy. Complexes give the single *objects* the context in which the arbitrariness of the mere *that it is* may find the first form of meaning: a purpose, a reason, a relation to other *objects*. Now, the complexes, the objectified relations of the level of *actuality*, reveal an analogous ‘meaninglessness’ indicating the vertical dimension of transcendence.

It seems to be a popular way of expressing dissatisfaction with the representational form of reflective thinking and the mere *objectivity* of dissociated ‘substances’ – referring everything to some ‘context’. There are innumerable variants which it would be impossible to review here. On the one hand, it has the charming appeal by introducing, although often only by implicature, the *subject*, since context is hardly something which can be determined in purely *objective* terms. On the other hand, since it is actually impossible to determine what context might possibly mean and what might possibly constitute a legitimate context for anything, one tends to extend it as far as ... everything. All pointers to coherence, totality, ‘the whole’ are ways of ‘contextualisation’, along with the more mundane attempts to put everything in the ‘historical context’, the ‘social context’, the ‘inferential context’, the ‘context of usage’, etc. Admirable as many of such attempts may be, they suffer from the inaccessibility of the eventual *more*. ‘Context’ tries to function as a surrogate for the negative aspect of every *recognition* and ‘contextualisation’, starting with the reflectively dissociated ‘atoms’, meets almost immediately the combinatorial barriers, §12. If we have  $n$  atoms and, in principle, any combination thereof might be a context, we get  $2^n$  contexts. Take half of them, one-tenth – as  $n$  increases, the number of contexts becomes very quickly unmanageable. Although context indeed points toward something endowing the *object* or the *complex* with a purpose, if not with meaning, it is hard to imagine how taking such (unmanageable number of) contexts into account is supposed to help understanding a given ‘atom’  $x$ . The only manageable, if not also the only important, question concerns which context to choose (which is nothing else but the question about the limits of  $x$ .)

The *more objective* contexts to investigate, the less understanding of the investigated issue; 51. the *more* information available, the *more* difficult to find any relevant, not to mention valuable, information; the *more* ambitious professor of the *more imprecise* subject (psychology, sociology, literature), the *more* attempts at mathematical *precision* in his research; the *more* persons with higher education, the *more* stupid and less knowledgeable each one of them. This general law – ‘the smarter, the *more* stupid’ or ‘the *more*, the *less*'; the *more* it accumulates, the *less* it obtains – underlies the whole life and expansion of *objectivistic* insatiability. “Look only at all the festivities of the intellect: these conceptions! These discoveries! Perspectives! Subtleties! Publications! Congresses! Discussions! Institutes! Universities! And still: stupefying.” As an example: “Precision, richness, depth of the language in all expositions, not only the primary, but also secondary ones, or even those on the edge of mere journalism (like literary criticism) are worthy highest appreciation. But the overflow of richness exhausts the attention, and so the increased precision is accompanied by the increased distraction. The result: instead of increased communication, increased misunderstanding. [...] In the field of all discussions penetrating western *episteme*, you will never hear a single voice which would start with ‘I do not know exactly... am not familiar with... did not read through... who could remember all that... there is no time to read... I know something, but not quite...’ Yet, exactly from that one ought to start! But who would dare?”<sup>56</sup> Instead, proving trifles, we let them parade as the genuine truths until, eventually, they start indeed to seem the same. And then more seriousness can only breed more ridicule, more smartness only more stupidity, more achievements only more despair and more truthfulness only more falsehood. The smarter, the *more* stupid; the *more*, the *less*.

*More* never sums up to any *unity* and, at best, keeps extending into *more* and *more* comprehensive 52. *totality*. But, the *more* comprehensive – the *less* comprehensible. The inversion reveals a lack. The *more* intensely one focuses on the *actual complexities*, the *less* sense and meaning one finds in them. The *more* one’s understanding approaches the self-secure enlightenment of scientism, the intellectual self-confidence or the safety of bourgeois sterility, the greater the chance that one may wake up as Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* – in the known, safe surroundings, in the same orderly house, in one’s own bed, but transformed into a cockroach scared, or rather merely

<sup>56</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *The Diaries*. 1966:XIX

pacified, by the inexplicable event of meaningless loss of one's so far obvious and unproblematic identity. At the limit of *more* one encounters ... oneself.

The subject may be encountered at the limit of the world and, perhaps, only there. "The subject does not belong to the world: rather it is a limit of the world."<sup>57</sup> But although never actually encountered, it is present in the world from the very beginning. The *objectivity* of a complex consists in its being given as an object in *actual* experience and, moreover, in the fact that its *more* is just more of *actual*, *objective* aspects. However, to the extent that a complex is not given immediately in its full complexity, it bears always a mark of 'subjectivity'. This is no longer the *subjectivity* of an ideal, purely *actual* subject, but a much more genuine 'subjectivity' understood as that which brings non-*actuality*, and eventually also *non-actuality*, into experience. The status of complexes as *external* and independent from us is much less evident than in the case of simple objects.

This aspect of 'subjectivity', the presence of ego, becomes manifest, for instance, in the questions like: Can I be sure that it is one and the same object? If I leave and come back, how can I know that it is the same? It is a bit hard to know what "to know" means in such questions, but we sense that the lack of immediate certainty is taken as the possibility of error, that is, 'subjectivity'. (After all, if all that is real are *immediate objects*, then even the relations between them turn out to be 'subjective'.) However, I experience this identity with such an infallible certainty that, if I were to doubt it, I could not be certain of anything. As Wittgenstein says: the burden lies here on those asking such questions – the burden of explaining what they would consider as knowing.

53. The subject, thus implicitly present all the time, is encountered by reflection at the limit of objectivity. The ideal limit of *more*, the ideal *totality* of complexes, *this world* as a *totality*, as a total complex of things, is also the place where it begins to dissolve in the incomprehensible flux of experience. The obsessive rigidity of a systematic organisation, when carried to the extremes, creates eventually mad chaos. The ever renewed and never accomplished project of control encounters *more* in the most dramatic fashion. When absolutised and driven beyond its proper limits, it makes one acutely aware of the uncontrollable *more* which lurks in the depth of everything which one believes to control. The disappointments of the projects of total appropriation, the failed attempts to control the inexhaustible *more*, throw us back onto ourselves – for the limit of the *horizontal transcendence* is always but a shadow of its *vertical aspect*. But the subject encountered thus at the limit of the world is encountered only as its own absence, as the lack of something which should be there but which is not. Or, if you prefer, the insatiability of Hegelian conceptualisation, of positivistic optimism, of sociological naivete breeds dissatisfaction, feeling of unfulfillment, of broken promise, perhaps nihilism, behind which emerge the personal, the 'subjective', the Nietzschean or Kierkegaardian.

### 1.3 Mineness

54. The confrontation with the chaos of experience, with the limitations of my ego, of my skills and powers, suspends the importance of objective facts and relations and engenders the reflection that *I am*. It marks a breach in the continuity of being presenting *myself* in as astonishing a light of dissociated independence as the realisation that *it is* did earlier with a simple *object*. Reflection that *it is*, the mere observation 'that...' of *object*'s immediacy, dissociates it and presents it as being 'on its own'. Reflection that *I am*, the mere observation 'that...' of my presence, does the same with me. In so far as I am considered in the *actuality* of this act, that is, in so far as I am considered as its *object*, I appear as isolated from the world, from any origin, I am alone, 'on my own'. By the same token, it seems, I am free, absolutely, unreservedly; I emerge *ex nihilo* with the same ungrounded arbitrariness as an *object* appears for a purely *actual* subject – it is, but might not be, and there is no apparent reason for its being rather than not being, or for its being so rather than otherwise. On my own – as free as arbitrary, as unconstrained as meaningless.

This dissociation from the world, similar to any *object*'s, is not accompanied by the similar externality. Such externality belongs still to the ego which is a collection of externalised contents.

<sup>57</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. 5.632 [The statement seems to apply most adequately to myself, although Wittgenstein's 'subject' or 'philosophical self' "is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world – not a part of it." [Ibid. 5.641] I, unlike ego, is its world by being its limit, the horizon within which life unfolds, as we will describe shortly.]

Here, on the contrary, I know, in the immediate self-consciousness, that it is me *myself* I encounter, an enigmatic site of continuous self-sameness. The enigma concerns precisely the sameness of *myself* who am reflecting in this very moment and *myself* who was yesterday, years ago, and whom I am going to be in all my future. And, surely, as long as one stays with the categories of *actuality* alone, as long as one yields to the unreserved claims of *objectivistic illusion*, this sameness poses an ever perplexing problem. In particular, because one, being unable to deny the experience of sameness, reverses the order of founding and tries, as Hume and others did, to refer it back to, if not derive it from the visible contents of the ego.

Reflection over *myself*, or *self-reflection*, is an act which attempts to actualise its intended *object*, 55. but for which this object immediately slips away and remains a mere noumenal site. And *self-reflection*, in the immediate *self-consciousness* is aware of this insufficiency. In it I admit that I am something much more than what can be made *actual* in any single *here-and-now*. I re-cognise *myself* as *myself*, that is, although I can never grasp *myself* fully in the *horizon of actuality*, I know that all the signs given in *self-reflection* point to *myself*, shallower or deeper appearances of mineness. I may discover dark and unexpected sides, but they are all intimately *my* sides, they are not, in any way, alien, external. All the signs signify some characteristics of *myself*, they appear as *my* characteristics, as recurring themes of *my* character, personality, being.

In *self-reflection* I experience *myself* as transcending the *horizon of actuality*, but merely as some noumenal site of identity. I know my identity which extends over time – not because I managed to *re-construct* and *comprehend* it but simply because I know it. Experience of this identity precedes any particular act of *reflection* and extends beyond it. It is experienced in the course of my whole life and does not depend on my reflecting over it or not. I know it long before I reflectively think about it. If experiences can transcend the *horizon of actuality* and be essentially *non-actual*, then so can the experiencing being. In this form of *reflection* I represent myself as a being whose identity is not, like *ego*'s, constructed from the *actual* contents, but extends over time and can only be made present for *reflection* by means of more or less inadequate indications, allusions, signs.

### **Temporality**

56.

Just like the temporal scope of *subject* (and *object*) is pure *here-and-now*, while of *ego* (and *complexes*) some finite and limited time, the *I* of the reflection that *I am* is finite but unlimited – it has no experienced beginning nor end. My birth is something *I* may be told about but not something *I* experience; my death is a perpetual not-yet and even when it approaches *I* do not experience death but dying. *I am* stretched, or better, *I am* stretching *myself* between these two limits, both real and yet ideal, since forever inaccessible.

They are *actual* only when projected onto the objective time, as particular points on the infinite line. The apprehension of the finitude of my being (here of its temporal span) emerges thus as the result of imposing its ideal end-points onto the infinite line of objective time. The infinity of this line is, of course, not experienced but only thought, and that only in terms of *more*, that is, as potential infinity. But one can perform the opposite operation of mapping the infinite line onto, for instance, finite but *open* interval, or on a finite circle (as in figure I:§167, p.91). The ideal end-points (which do not belong to an open interval, while on the circle become the same pole) become then the image of the infinity – the point in infinity. This point functions thus as the beginning, and the end, of the supposedly infinite line. We could say that this folding of objective line onto finite circle represents ‘relativisation’ of the objective time to the temporality of my being.

The question “What was before the beginning of the world?” is as unavoidable from the perspective of objective time, that is, at the level of *actuality*, as it is unanswerable. Potential infinity of the objective time is the backbone of the proof of the antithesis of the first antinomy. *Objectivistic illusion*, being based on the unwarranted extrapolation, can not admit any limits – time must be infinite. On the other hand, the intuition of *origination*, of the ideal *unexperienced* beginning and end is the source of the respective thesis. The antinomy reflects thus again the mixture of levels, where the *objectivistic* infinity is confronted with the *experiential* finitude, the unimaginable beginning-end with the intuited *origin*. Temporality emerges only from the separation of an existence, that is, it has an *origin*, though not a beginning nor end. Beginning and end are only objectified images of the *origin*. This time which has *originated* somewhere but which has neither beginning nor end, the finite yet unlimited time, is the temporal context of the

experience that I am.

### 1.3.1. The signs

The experience that I am is an experience suspending the unquestioned validity of the objective world. The signs of mineness are no longer relative to specific organs nor even to the whole body; they are no longer sensations nor vital feelings; they are no longer localised, are not narrowed to the context of actuality. Laughter of a happy man is different from the laughter of a desperate man, even if they both laugh at the same things. The original signs of mineness are kind of feelings, but not related to the actual situation, rather, modifying its perception ‘soulful’ feelings, relative to the pure quality of life, of oneself or, if you prefer, of one’s soul.

57.

#### *Original signs*

The original signs at this level are what we will call “qualities of life”, or shortly “qualities”. Most vaguely, these are just feelings – however, not ones concerning a particular thing, situation or person, but the feelings concerning some vague unity: of my life, of the world, of life. Phenomenologically, one might perhaps say that ‘my life’ is their noematic correlate. But it is rather so that they are given as qualities penetrating the horizon of my life, not as its more or less accidental properties, but as the qualities constituting this very horizon. They are not signs of anything particular, of any things or situations as impressions were; they are not relative to my ego but to myself; they are not specific, situated moods but qualities of the whole: life, my experience, the world. We notice easily such a quality with a child, often even before it starts talking. (The absence of verbal communication seems to increase receptivity for other kinds of messages.) The whole future can be seen – not, of course, any details concerning the development, career and the like, not any specific events of the future but ‘the whole future’, the quality of the person that is, the quality of his life.<sup>58</sup> This strong impression we often get from children becomes, with the adults, weakened by the noise of all more specific features, habits and norms but, our claim goes, it remains the same quality. And, like with everything else, the qualities distinguishable by others can also be distinguished by us.

58.

A feeling of peace may arise in a particular situation and be experienced as relating to this – peaceful – situation only. But qualities like ‘peaceful’, even if uncovered by moods and impressions, are not reserved for particular situations within the world. The same qualities may appear in a more intimate, deeper and hence more intense fashion as the qualities of life. There is a fundamental difference between a feeling of elation situated in a concrete situation and the joy of life which is only actualised in a particular situation. What distinguishes them is that the latter lack any objective correlates, any complexes which might be identified as their site, their proper origin. Complexes are here only sites where such feelings are actualised, not by which they are caused.

A feeling of peace, in the sense of a quality of life, as a sign of mineness, even if experienced in a particular context, is not limited by it, is not experienced as exclusively a quality of this moment but, on the contrary, as something which is merely actualised in it and which is a much more solid quality of something deeper. A feeling of joy, as a quality of life, is not the vital feeling of elation and vigour which may pass or change into its opposite in the matter of hours or minutes. It is a calm feeling of my life which, through all the variations of vital feelings and moods, through all the variations of situated joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, unveils a theme which underlies and as if surrounds all of them. The qualities of life constitute as if a deeper layer of moods and impressions. They are experienced underneath variations of different situations which, in themselves, give rise to very different impressions and moods. Going far away, to an exotic and unfamiliar corner of the world, is naturally accompanied by an excitement and openness to the encounter with something – as the expectations go – completely new. But after some time (perhaps a week, perhaps a year), when the storm of novelties and initial impressions has calmed down, there arises a specific mood of something familiar in the midst of all this unfamiliarity. One notices that, as a matter of fact, in spite of all the differences and novelties, one has not traveled that far. Even if the mood of the life ‘out there’ is very different from that at home, the mood of

---

<sup>58</sup>For instance, “Plotinus foretold also the future of each of the children in the household: for instance, when questioned as to Polemon’s character and destiny he said: “He will be amorous and short-lived”: and so it proved.” [Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus....* 11.]

my life seems to be only slightly affected by it and, at the bottom, remained the same. Variation of lower *moods* and *impressions* uncovers often deeper *qualities*. In general, they need not be so *visible*. They are constant themes which remain unthematised but are *experienced* as if in the background of *actual* situations, as mere modifications of particular *moods* and *impressions*. Laughter of a happy man is different from the laughter of a desperate man. Being the *qualities* of life, they have no particular object but embrace all objects, like an aura which surrounds all the situations, the world and life.

Having no particular objects, they may be *clear* and *recognisable*, but are certainly *vague* and hardly definable. This undefinable *vagueness*, this lack of any *objective* correlates gives such feelings a calm character. Even if the *quality of life* is restless and confused, the feeling of it is not so. Because it is experienced as given – not in the sense of *actual* givenness of an *object*, but in the sense of givenness of something which is greater than any particular *object* and situation, which is greater than what can be controlled and influenced at the moment. Even if encountered in a particular situation, it is not limited to this situation, it does not aim at any *action* or expression – it merely dawns on me. To the extent the *quality* has a negative character, it is experienced with resignation or wish that it be different. If it has a positive character, the same kind of calmness becomes a thankful acceptance. Any possible reactions, whether sudden outbursts, protests or satisfaction, are at most *actual* expressions motivated by such underlying feelings but not their proper *signs*. Calm reaction can express certainty or resignation, laughter can express acceptance or contempt, almost any *actual mood* and reaction can be associated with various deeper feelings and, eventually, *qualities*. And it is only this deeper association, this undefinable *rest*, which, on the one hand, modifies the *actual signs* so that one's laughter is unmistakably distinct from another's and, on the other hand, gives the *actual signs* their more profound meaning reaching beyond the mere *horizon of actuality*.

Most abstractly, the *qualities* might be divided into feelings of spiritual<sup>59</sup> gratification, peace, on the one hand, and sadness, mourning, on the other. To most people the *quality of life* makes it worth living, but to some it does not. The immediate, *original signs* of the former is the simple fact that one does continue living, of the latter – suicide. But these are abstractions. Every person, every life has its unique *quality* and it is only up to *reflection* to decide how far it wants to abstract or distinguish, what it wants to consider as analogies and what as differences. Every man carries with him the *quality of his life* which can be sensed and experienced (even if not contained in a precise concept) by himself and by others. There are people whose life *is* light or shallow, and whose life *is* sad or tragic. The *quality of life* of Ivan Karamazov, sharply independent, confusedly intellectual is something very different from the peacefully submissive, warmly open *quality of life* of Alosa. Their thirst and search have quite different *qualities*, even if, perhaps, both *thirst* eventually for the same. Every person has, besides recognisable and repeatable features, besides some character traits which can be shared with others, *above all* that which can ever be captured by the *actual look*, something – *je ne sais quoi* – which gives all these features a uniquely personal touch.

Unlike vital feelings, *qualities of life* are not *actual* expressions of animated, alive energy, and not even of life in general, but of *my life*. Life in general may have all kinds of alternative qualities; it may be tragic *or* comic, meaningful *or* wasted, hard *or* easy, intense *or* peaceful. My life too can have different qualities for which we need different words, but to the extent these signify the *quality of life*, they are joined not by 'or' but by 'and'. My life can be both tragic *and* comic, but then this conjunction, as well as the particular ways of its manifestations express, or rather only try to express, this particular and unique *quality*.

#### **Reflective signs**

60.

Verbal statements of such qualities involve already a *reflective* attitude. Very roughly and approximately, they are preceded by "I am..." rather than "I feel..." "I feel nice" suggests a situated context in which this feeling arises. We do not say "I am nice" in the same sense. "I feel dissatisfaction", too, refers implicitly to a dissatisfying situation. "I am dissatisfied" may be said in the same sense, but it may also be said in the broader sense of "My life is dissatisfying". The statements like "Life is difficult/restless/meaningless/etc.", or else "Life is peaceful, even though each day is a struggle." are usually made in response to particular circumstances, in a specific

---

<sup>59</sup>The word "soulful" would seem more appropriate here if it did not carry all too emotional connotations.

context of paternalistic advice to a child or an intimate complain to a close friend. They thus presuppose a particular frame of mind, a particular mood and, often, a reflective attitude. But these are only possible conditions for actually *making* such statements. The statements themselves are incomplete and imperfect expressions of the *qualities* – the *reflective signs* of the experienced *quality of my life*.

We are not concerned with the *truth* of such statements. They are never true in the strict, objectivistic sense of the word. And yet, they do witness to *experiences* of a different order than the experiences of *complexes*, they witness to feelings of different kind than *moods* and *impressions*. One may easily claim that such statements are merely generalisations from a series of experiences and express nothing more than their common features. Yet, if one wants to maintain this empiristic view, one should also explain what the supposed subject of all these predicates is and what constitutes the need for such useless judgments. In fact, the statements are neither meaningless nor useless. Their meaning is grounded in the experience of one's life and even if they do not express *precise* content, they can communicate the intended *qualities*, they can be understood by a sympathy which need not *conceptual precision* but only sufficient indications.

Mere words are never sufficient to communicate the *quality of life*. Typically, one has to tell a story, perhaps a long story, and certainly a whole-hearted story, in order to communicate verbally the *quality of one's life*. But the *quality* itself, the emotion *is experienced* by everybody, even if one usually lacks words for expressing it unequivocally and borrows the words designating primarily *moods* and *impressions*. And it is precisely the very fact that such verbal expressions are always given with the *accompanying awareness* of their insufficiency and inadequacy, which suggests the *unity* of the underlying experience. The experience of the words being insufficient for the expression of the *quality of life* is also the experience of the *unity* of life which simply *transcends* any *actual* expressions.

61. The *reflective signs* of the experience that *I am* are *general thoughts* setting up a distinction, often an opposition, between *myself* and *the world*. These are no longer mere *concepts* summarising the properties of this or that and the relations of this to that, but unverifiable, *general thoughts* about the character of the world, on the one hand, and the *quality of life*, on the other. The distinction posited by *reflection* between the world and one's life is, in fact, only an artificial extension of the *subject-object* dualism to the *posited totality*. The properties ascribed to the world happen to reflect only the *quality of my life* and vice versa. Saying something like "All the world's a stage, // And all the men and women merely players"<sup>60</sup> or "This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange // That even our loves should with our fortunes change,"<sup>61</sup> one seems to characterise the world, but this is only a matter of grammar. One actually states something about the life in the world, about the *quality of life*. Certainly, one does not state any true fact, even less a fact which could be verified. But one does not make any false statement, either – one expresses *general thoughts*.

Discussing *actual* matters – the current political situation in ..., the recent fashion in literary criticism, the choice of furniture, the events at work ... – one can pretend to remain half-anonymous, to keep an 'objective' distance to the matter at hand which, in fact, is depersonalised and external. But the more general statements one makes, characterising the totality of the world and the workings of human life and affairs, the less possibility to retain the distance and the more one unveils *oneself*. Making a statement about the world or life in general, I am bound to unveil *myself*. Saying "The world is cruel and hostile." I make so much an 'objective' statement about the course of the world as about my 'subjective' experience of the world. The obvious, immediate conclusion following such a statement could be something like "One has to watch one steps not to be trapped by the world's (other people's) hostile schemes..." The former involves and unveils (if not logically implies) the latter. And in the same way, a suspicious "I am always careful in all my dealings to avoid..." implies something about the understanding of the world. The first, apparently paradoxical, moment of the medieval *memento mori* is to direct the attention to *one's* life. But this turn is to be done against the understanding of the limited and passing value of the things of *this world*. The universal doubt recommended by Descartes is so much an expression of a shrewd, suspicious intellect, as of the understanding of the world which – who knows? – might be under a spell of the 'Evil Spirit'. We do not know, but its mere possibility makes the world

---

<sup>60</sup> W. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*. II:7 (Jaques)

<sup>61</sup> W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. III:2 (Player King)

untrustworthy.

*Qualities of life*, the *original signs of mineness* do not necessarily involve the clear split into *the world* on the one hand and *myself* on the other. Although *reflection* will easily distinguish *myself* from my world, the *general thoughts*, too, tell one as much about the world as about the speaker. The more “general” issues one addresses, the more of oneself one has to unveil. “He who says ‘life is real, life is earnest’, however much he may speak of the fundamental mysteriousness of things, gives a distinct definition of this mysteriousness by ascribing to it the right to claim from us the particular mood called seriousness – which means willingness to live with energy, though energy bring pain. The same is true of him who says that all is vanity. For indefinable as the predicate ‘vanity’ may be *in se*, it is clearly something that permits anaesthesia, mere escape from suffering, to be our rule of life.”<sup>62</sup>

Statements “Life is...”, “The world is...” and “My life is...” do not only appear conceptually equally empty (in spite of all the existential content they carry), they are equipotent, they say the same about the same. They can be supported by various arguments and examples, can be related to other thoughts, elaborated *ad nauseam* over a glass of beer or whiskey (and another glass, and another...) Eventually, they tell you nothing about the world or life in general, but only about a *possible experience* of world and life – i.e., about the person making this statement and *his* experience of life. “The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man.”<sup>63</sup>

### 1.3.2. This world

We must admit that the *totality* of all things of *this world* is never given in *an actual experience*.<sup>62</sup> But the conclusion that there is no such unity as *this world* follows then only if one has reduced reality to *actual experiences*. If nothing more than, at least, our inability to give up the mode of speaking involving such general judgments about the world or life suggests that there may be some *experienced unity* which transcends the distinctions made within it. We do not look for proofs and merely claim the presence of such a *unity*. There are *totalities* which are reducible to their constituents, which are only sums of their parts. *This world*, however, is not such a *totality*.<sup>64</sup> If it can be *posited* as one *totality*, it is only because there is already *experienced unity*, which only calls for some *actual expression* or, in more obsessive case, an explanation. Like any *unity* which *transcends* some *complex* of distinctions, this *unity* which is not reducible to the *totality* of things is more primordial than their *posited totality*.<sup>65</sup> In some strange way, phenomenologists managed to coin the phrase “phenomenon of the world”. But *the world* is not a phenomenon; it does not appear in a unity of a single act of consciousness. What appears in such acts is an empty word, a *vague* idea of something close to void of any content, a mere *sign* pointing towards some all-embracing container. True, the *sign* is not entirely void and this is why one feels justified in analysing the assumed ‘phenomenon’. But such an analysis concerns only series of distinct, *actual phenomena*. Their *unity* has no phenomenal content. The divergent analyses of the supposed phenomenon among various phenomenologists illustrate not only the failure of making *the world* into a correlate of adequate intuition, but also the general fact of irreducibility of its *transcendent unity* to the *actuality* of features, facts, things and observations.

Since we do not need adequate intuition nor exhaustive characterisations, we should be allowed to<sup>63</sup> say that *this world* is the givenness of the visible, givenness not merely as an *immediate actuality*

<sup>62</sup> W. James, *Essays in Pragmatism*. I;p.19

<sup>63</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. 6.43

<sup>64</sup> In fact, we would not even know what the supposed parts are. The interested may follow the interminable discussions trying to decide whether these are things, facts, matters at hand, states of affairs... We, of course, won't.

<sup>65</sup> In general, *unity founds totality* and such a *founding unity transcends* the respective *totality*. In particular, *the world transcends* the multiplicity of ‘things within the world’. “That which in any multiplicity is unitary did not flow out of any of its elements, that which is unitary in [common to] all cannot come from one among all but remains characteristic property of that unitary one.” [Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §21] It is like Cusanus’ universe of ‘all things’ which, however “are not ‘many things’, since plurality does not precede each thing. For this reason, in the order of nature ‘all things’ have, without plurality, preceded each thing.” [Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. II 5/117] Or in the words of Heidegger’s “Neither the ontical depiction of entities within-the-world nor the ontological Interpretation of their Being is such as to reach the phenomenon of the ‘world’. In both of these ways of access to ‘Objective Being’, the ‘world’ has already been ‘presupposed’, and indeed in various ways.” [M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. I:3.14 [H64]]

but as the field of one's activities, passions, goals, in short, the field of one's life. It does contain things, tools, situations, concepts but this is just an analytical statement – all these are just the *cuts from experience* which can be circumscribed within the *horizon of actuality*, and thus underlies your control. *This world* is the horizon of *visibility*, the horizon within which anything *actual* may appear. The Husserlian notion of a 'horizon' has much intuitive appeal and it should not be taken as merely something surrounding *visible* things. It is something from which all *visible* things emerge. We could say, it is the *visibility* itself. If we were to use the language we have given up: it is not an accidental *totality* (*totality* is, in fact, always somewhat accidental) of dissociated 'substances' but, on the contrary, it is the 'substance' of which all particular things are accidents.

Rephrasing this last paragraph: *this world* emerges as the third hypostasis (I:3), as *chaos* turned into *re-cognisable* experience. *This world* precedes all the things which we later find within it. And it does so not only ontologically but also epistemologically. (For, as a matter of fact, the generative order of *founding* coincides with the ontological order and, with respect to the most fundamental notions and entities, also with the epistemological order: what emerges first, is also what is most intimately given, that is, experienced.)

*The world* considered from the present level bears a resemblance to 'Lebenswelt' in that it manifests itself phenomenally only as the ideal horizon of the contents appearing within it and, consequently, as the field of our activity and life. One has a strong tendency to see it only as a *totality* of things rather than as a *unity* of its own because *reflective* experience is unable to grasp this *unity* in the *actuality* of a single act: *the world* is not an *object* of an experience. But *the world* manifests itself in *any experience*, not as its thematic *object*, but as the constant aspect which actually connects all *actual experiences*, which is the same, constant field of their unfolding. In every experience, it is *mitgegeben* but only as a kind of noumenal unity, as an indication of the presence of the totality of things of experience; not as a concrete 'horizon' of related things, but rather as a mere background, the ground on which the *actual experience* finds place. In this sense, *the world* is indeed in each thing, is *reflected* in every experience.<sup>66</sup> But its *unity* precedes all these experiences, it is not *founded* on them but in the respective hypostasis which is beyond phenomenological grasp.

### 1.3.3. I

64. *Self-reflection, reflection that I am*, is an *act* which may attempt to *actualise* its intention, but is always aware of its own insufficiency. In it *I* re-cognise that *I am here-and-now* but at the same time also that *I am* something more. *I* re-cognise myself *as myself*, that is, the *immediacy* of the *act* is only a *sign* of something which *transcends* it and does it *essentially*. *I* re-cognise myself as something which can never be reduced to the *actuality* of an *act*. We could say, a constitutive feature of the act of *self-reflection* is the recognition of its irreparable insufficiency.

*I* re-cognise myself as transcending the *horizon of actuality*, but merely as some noumenal site of identity. *I* know my identity which extends over time – not because *I* managed to *re-construct* and comprehend it but simply because *I* know it. It is experienced before this particular act of reflection and extends beyond it. It is experienced in the course of my whole life and does not depend on my *reflecting* over it or not. This known *unity* which never becomes an *object* of an experience reflects the thesis I:\$98, p. 50. If single experience can be essentially *non-actual*, then so can be the experiencing being. In this form of *reflection* *I* re-cognise myself as a being whose identity is not, like ego's, constructed from the *actual* contents, but *transcends* them, extends over time and can only be approximated by *reflection* by means of more or less adequate indications, allusions, *signs*.

65. "Who am I?" is the question of adolescence emerging from the egotic preoccupations and beginning to recognise the wider horizon of one's life. But the question never finds an adequate answer. One would like to know: I am (going to be) a carpenter, a family man, a dedicated father, a scientist, a politician, a charmer,... Or else: I am intelligent, I am pretty, I am weak, I am too

---

<sup>66</sup>"But since the universe is in each [thing] in such a way that each is in it, in each thing the universe is in a contracted way that which this thing is contractedly, and in the universe each thing is in the universe, although the universe is in each thing in one way, and each thing is in universe in a different way. [...] Indeed, in a stone all things are stone; in a vegetative soul all are vegetative soul; in life all are life; in the senses all are senses; in sight all are sight; in hearing all are hearing; in imagination all are imagination; in reason all are reason [...]" [Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. II:5/118]

vulnerable,... One would like to get an answer in terms of *actual*, *reflective* categories but such an answer would amount to reducing *oneself* to one's ego. The only answer is that *I am myself*, but to understand and accept it one has first to live, transcend one's egotism – for the mere reflective thirst for plain *visibility* it is empty and disappointing.

The question never finds an adequate answer because one has a multiplicity of egos, none of which nor the *totality* of which exhaust *oneself*. The relation between *oneself* and one's egos can be compared to that between the residual correlate obtained in the process of variation (like eidetic reduction, only varying the whole life) in which the varied elements are egos. There are, for instance, persons with strong skills for social adaptation, perhaps actor-like characters, who behaving differently on different occasions, do not suffer from any identity crises; or else, 'rich personalities' with a wide range of forms of expression which may easily seem incongruent but which are underlined some higher form of personal control. In fact, every person has a similar multiplicity of egos, or 'persona': one for work, one for home, another for friends at one's place and another for friends at their place, one for children, another for a party,... Strength of a personality is much closer related to the wide span of apparently incongruent egos the person possesses and controls, than to the uniformity of one's egos across different contexts and situations.

On the other hand, the multiplicity of egos is also what makes personal disintegration possible. 66. The question which an ideal theory of a simple, 'substantial', 'atomic' *subjectivity* must answer in negative is: "Is the disintegration of personal identity, the loss of one's consistency and continuity possible?" In the *immediacy* of pure *subjectivity* such a loss is impossible – there is no *time* for it! But identification of the 'subject', the *unity* of human being with the *immediate consciousness* is of little help because, as we well know, such a disintegration is possible. It is possible because *I*, being stretched in time, can lose the continuity in time – *I* can be *dissociated* into a multiplicity of egos.

Dissociative identity disorder, DID, shows that one can possess a multiplicity of egos, each of which is sufficiently integrated to have a relatively stable life of its own and recurrently to take full control of the person's behavior.<sup>67</sup> Differences between various egos of one person may be astonishing – amnesia of other egos, changed wishes, attitudes, interests, hand writing, even different physiological indices like heart rate, blood pressure, EEG.<sup>68</sup> A person suffering from DID has, as a normal person, a multiplicity of possessions, namely egos. The difference is that, while a healthy person possesses egos keeping them under some degree of control, with a sick person it is egos which gain uncanny autonomy and possess the person. The relation between *I* and egos gets inverted, *I* is conflated to the level of egos and, unable to organise them, suffers their multiplicity.

It is easy to misuse such examples to suggest that 'in reality' there is no *I* and only a multiplicity 67. of somethings, e.g., egos. But the fact that we can demolish a building into a heap of bricks proves neither the unreality of the building nor that it is, 'in reality', only a heap of bricks. Phenomena like DID represent disintegration and not, for instance, simple multiplication. As a disintegration, it is possible because 'subject' (person, man) is not any ideal and extensionless point, but because in its temporal duration it possesses *complex* aspects whose configurations may change. But there is more than the mere disintegration. It changes certainly the feeling of life and the sense of *oneself*, but it does not change the fact that even such a person is *oneself* all the time. Each of the egos has only a "relatively stable life of its own". While psychologists focus on what constitutes the problem – the dissociation of the *sense of identity* – one should not forget all the rest – the *unity* prevailing above the *actual* multiplicity. For instance, usually there is one dominant personality (who 'knows' about others), and one can often change at will from one to another, through a process similar to self-hypnosis (DID patients are highly hypnotisable and susceptible to self-hypnosis). It is the person *himself* who starts spawning new egos to handle some unbearable emotional problems (child abuse is the recurring theme in the etiology of DID, the first alter ego appears usually between the 4th and 6th year of life); it is the person himself who still keeps some degree of continuity,<sup>69</sup> it is the person *himself* who addresses the therapist;

<sup>67</sup> Milder forms of dissociative or organic amnesia, fugue states (flight from one's identity, frequent in war victims) can be mentioned here as well, even though some psychologists challenge the reasons for identifying – if not the very reality of – such disorders. DID used also to be called "multiple personality disorder". We do not see much of personality in the *complexes* affected by such disorders – they seem to coincide with our *ego*.

<sup>68</sup> D. Lester, *Multiple personality: a review*

<sup>69</sup> In the well-known Julie-Jenny-Jerrie case, Jerrie says: "I wish Julie would stop smoking. I hate the taste of tobacco." The split is there, but it is obviously maintained by somebody. Jerrie knows about Julie while Jenny,

and most importantly, it is the person *himself* who is being treated and, as the case may be, cured. A successful treatment of DID results in an integration of multiple egos: in either merging or associating them in the unity of one person. It is not the multiplicity of egos which got cured – it is *the person*.

68. *Reflection dissociates and posits I* against – opposed to, thrown into, confronted with – a foreign world. The *I* revealed to *self-reflection* is not explicable in the way *ego* might be. It is not *transcendent* in the way *ego* is, merged with the world and its *visible*, even if *unclear* affairs. *I* is something other, something beyond and above the world, something ... *noumenal*. It does not belong there among things and *complexes*, it does not belong among others who, for the moment, are just foreigners. The pure *I* of the *reflection that I am* is, as Camus would repeat after so many others, a stranger.

The strangeness is, however, only in the *externalised objects* and, likewise, in their *posited totality*. *This* is the kind of world in which *soul* is a stranger, the world viewed by the abstract *reflection* as a mere *totality* of things, of *dissociated situations*, eventually, of irrational and meaningless events.

Concretely, however, (and that means, without attempts at reduction to plain *visibility* of the *actual givens*) *self-reflection* marks the experience of one's life. We have purposefully not distinguished between the *qualities of life* and the feelings thereof. We would be tempted to identify them.<sup>70</sup> The feeling of my life is the same as the feeling of its *quality*, and only *reflection* tends to *dissociate* the two. I do not experience some feelings which then can be identified as revealing some *qualities*. They are the same thing, and we *dissociate* them only by *externalising* the *qualities* as some *objects* distinct from the *signs*, the feelings through which they appear.

One's life not only exceeds the *horizon of actuality*, but also remains forever, *essentially*, outside it, always richer, always inexhaustible. Seen this way, the richness of one's life is a counterpart of the noumenal emptiness of the bare, self-identical *I*. Experience of *myself* is equiprimordial with the experience of my life. One tends to think the latter as an accident of the former but this is because the former has still deeper roots to which we will return shortly. My life is not something which *I* of *self-reflection* has, it is something it is. *I* do not live my life – *I am my life*.

To use yet another word, we can say that the richness of one's life is one's *soul*. One can build one's life on an example of a person one respects, develop one's soul inspired by another, learn something from another's life. But one *soul*, the uniqueness of one life and its *quality* can not be repeated. There is nothing like '*a soul*'. Soul is always *concrete*, it is always this particular life, this concrete world. *Soul* is not alive, it is life. And it is life because it is *the world* and *the world* is life. One's *soul*, *oneself* becomes emptied of life to the extent it is *posited* by *reflection* as an independent entity, an isolated being only potentially capable of an involvement in an alien world. *Dasein* which 'falls within the world' is a gnostic abstraction – even if some feelings in the face of dissolving values and depersonalised world could be described this way it is, eventually, a harmful sign of alienation. The *quality of life* is the *quality of the soul* and is the *quality of its world* – the three can be *dissociated* only by *reflective abstraction*. *The world* understood as the continuity of experience, as the *unity* preceding, and hence stretching beyond its temporal differentiation into the *dissociated objects*, is the same as my life, is intimately *my world*. "The world and life are one. I am my world."<sup>71</sup> Consequently, *I* being *the world of my life*, it precedes the things emerging within *the world* just like *the world* does – not only the emergence of *the world* but also the creation of man "is prior to those things which were created with it or in it or below it."<sup>72</sup>

69. The *equipollence* of *I* and *my world* does not amount to any 'subjectivism'. "Of course, you may confront me with: 'But are you sure your story is really the true and right one?' But what does it really matter what the *reality outside myself* is, as long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am alive, to feel the very nature of the creature that I am."<sup>73</sup> In fact, it matters quite a lot, unless one is willing to assume the attitude of a decadent aestheticism which, by its very *self-reflection*,

---

the original *ego*, knows about both other.

<sup>70</sup>But identify – not reduce the *qualities* to mere feelings! *Qualities* are not only 'subjective feelings'. Rather, both are alternative, hardly distinguishable *aspects* of the same personal *nexus*.

<sup>71</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. 5.621, 5.63

<sup>72</sup>J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. IV:779ABCD [We won't dwell on Eriugena's distinction of orders of precedence and the fact that "prior" above refers only to knowledge and rank (corresponding to our *founding*) though not time.]

<sup>73</sup>C. Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*. Windows [my emph.] "Why could the world *which is of any concern to us* – not be a fiction?" [F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. 34]

sets itself apart and, as it would like to believe, above the world; the attitude which *opposes* the two, which feels forced to claim that “nothing is ‘given’ as real except our world of desires and passions, that we can rise or sink to no other ‘reality’ than the reality of our drives.”<sup>74</sup> The very fact of opposing *oneself* and the ‘reality outside’ witnesses to a disturbance, to a breach, a doubt not only about the ‘reality outside’ but also about *oneself*. In a sense, it is true that “[t]here can be no progress (real, that is, moral) except in the individual and by the individual himself.”<sup>75</sup> But such a progress is not the matter of one’s ‘subjectivity’. It is the matter of *oneself* as much as of one’s world. The two, being the same, change and progress together or not at all, “and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”<sup>76</sup>

If one wants to change one’s life, not only this or that aspect of it but *oneself*, one has to change one’s world. Good soul cannot live in an evil world, for no matter to how much evil *the world* exposes the soul, the good soul will still see – in *the world* – the reason to be good. To be good *in spite of the evil in the world* is to assume an attitude which, at some point, does not reflect one’s being. To be good in *the world* which is evil is to be a rigid moralist, a pharisee or, in a more lofty variant, a resigned stoic who is only a tiny step from the apathy of a bored intellectual, gnawed by the ‘unreality’ of his lofty ‘ideas and ideals’. To be good is not only being good but also finding goodness, finding the need and reason for it not only in the self-goodness of one’s inner life but in *the world*. “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”<sup>77</sup> But ‘the treasure of the heart’ is not any private ‘subjectivity’ of one’s ‘inner life’. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”<sup>78</sup> The ‘treasure’ is something *I* find, something which is encountered, given to *me* from above and not something *I* assume or decide to value. This ‘treasure’ is that which shapes *my* heart, *my* soul, while its lack leaves the *soul* empty.

If one wants to change one’s life, not only this or that aspect of it but *oneself*, one has to change 70. the *world*. One’s life acquires a new *quality* not because one has realised something important in a momentaneous illumination but as a consequence of encountering a new way of *experiencing the world*, of finding a new ‘treasure’. Certainly, there are many pathological cases against which a mere analysis, psychoanalysis or cognitive psychotherapy may help. But their value is limited to the lower levels of egotic disturbances. The faith in their unlimited power may arise only from the assumption of a genuine *dissociation* of a person from *his world*, according to which each can be ‘treated’ independently from the other.<sup>79</sup> Healing a true suffering of a *soul* amounts to healing *the world* of this *soul* for, in deeper respects, one can hardly change understanding of the world without actually *experiencing* a changed world. Sometimes, a travel to a remote place may be needed to regenerate the *soul*. An emotional impairment resulting from the lack of love and warmth can hardly be changed by a mere realisation that this was its cause. It may need not only the will to change it but also the very experience of love and warmth. This is what often makes meeting new people worthwhile: they can make things which seemed impossible, even non-existent, to appear obvious and natural. They may show us a different world which cures the lacks of the world in which we used to live.

My life, that is, *the world*, is the field of *my* expression. Its unlimited – though finite – temporal 71. (and spatial) scope is no longer a stage of single *acts* or manipulative *actions* but of *activity* in the broadest sense of the word, *activity* which is not merely a sum of *acts* and *actions*, which is not directed towards achievement of some goals, but which expresses the *traces* of values, the

<sup>74</sup>F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. 36

<sup>75</sup>C. Baudelaire, *My Heart Laid Bare*.

<sup>76</sup>Matt. VII:2

<sup>77</sup>Matt. XII:35; Lk. VI:45

<sup>78</sup>Matt. VI:21; Lk. XII:34

<sup>79</sup>Many examples of the resulting oppositions can be found in the society of Victorian *fin de siècle*: positivistic scientism and utilitarianism are opposed nervously by the search for the freedom of will and calls to cultivate ‘art for art’s sake’; bourgeois norms and industrial routine is equally nervously opposed by the cult of intense experience, hashish, absinthe and Bohemian decadence; neurasthenic apathy and weary reflection call for passionate and heroic action; the progressing depersonalisation and society turning into masses, if not mob, are met with almost pietistic calls to personal concentration and authenticity. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Wilde, Freud, Nietzsche, Spencer, Dostoevsky, James . . . It is hard to avoid the sense of artificiality – if not of the view of the world and of the involved oppositions, then of the individual attitude attempted *in spite of* and against the world (or was it in spite of and against *oneself*?). Much of the XX-th century’s so called “existentialism” sailed under the same banner.

motives which shape the horizon for selecting possible goals.<sup>80</sup> My life is just that – the way I spend my time. A common answer to the question “Who is he?” would simply tell what the person is doing for living. A profession tells something precisely about that: what one does with one’s time, or even better, to what one dedicates one’s time. A (deliberate) choice of profession may involve detailed arguments about specific demands and forms of activity associated with it. But it always involves more, a hardly expressible feeling of the *quality*, of the character of the profession, which should correspond to the feelings of one’s values and the sense of what is meaningful. One wants one’s activities to reflect the (passive) feelings of *qualities* and values. (Of course, profession is hardly ever an exhaustive characterisation – one may actually hate one’s work and devote much more and more intense time to other, non-professional activities.) The activity to which one devotes much of one’s time, expresses also the *quality* of one’s life. And it is no longer talk about simple grasping-avoiding as in the case of *objects*, nor arranging-preventing as in the case of *complexes*, but about dedication, about accepting some values *transcending* the *actuality* and about dedicating one’s life to their expression.

72. Not only changing one’s life involves changing *the world* but also vice versa. If one wants to change *the world*, that is, not this or that thing but *the world*, one has to bring to it a changed *quality* of one’s life. Achievements, deeds, goals, reforms do change the objective world. But it is never certain if they also will change *the world*. In most cases, they do not, and the more extreme changes of the world make only the remoteness of salvation more clear. “How can an event which, like war, eliminates discussion and opens every possibility by denying every norm, bring salvation to humanity?”<sup>81</sup> How can it bring salvation even only to its perpetrators? Revolution as a means of abolishing alienation is one of the most tragic human inventions but it is only an extreme case of frustration turned into destruction of which there are many examples. With respect to the personal dimension of existence, social activism suffers from the insufficiency, if not irrelevancy, which broods even over the satisfaction from the *actual* successes. No doubt, improving social institutions may be a venerable *activity*. But looking in it for the medicine against personal problems and changed *quality* of one’s life is, at best, a misunderstanding and, at worst, an instinctive resentment, the more dangerous because unchecked in its convictions about its beneficent intentions.<sup>82</sup> It is true that living in a particular world may promote some and not other ways of *experiencing* and only some, but not other *qualities of life*. But these are, at best, statistical tendencies. They never have a predictable effect on a particular individual whose *world* is much more than the objective world of tools and political, economical and social organisation.

#### 1.3.4. Transcendence

73. At the current level, one finds the distinction between the personal and impersonal, but the distinction between the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’ loses almost completely its meaning. It is *myself*, *my life* which is involved, in a sense, the most ‘subjective’ aspect of experience. On the ‘objective’ side there is, perhaps, the world, in the sense of ‘everything but me’. But this phrase can signify here only the correlate of my life, the field of its unfolding. *The world*, *my life*, *experience* and *myself* are close to synonymous.

To be sure, we do live in the objective world, we do make plans, manage worldly situations, use tools. But all these *complexes* are correlates of my *ego*, they are only ‘parts’ of the world and are *below* me. Viewing *the world* as their *totality* is a simple-minded, and always unsuccessful, reduction. Things, *complexes*, particular situations and singular experiences not only never exhaust the experience of the world – they do not even provide the ground for such experience which is *founded* upon the *unity transcending* their *totality*, *transcending* the objective world.

74. The tension of *horizontal transcendence* at this level does not arise from the *more* of *complexes* but from the basic opposition between *mine* and *not-mine*. It is immediately present in the *reflection* that *I am* which performs a highly artificial operation of *dissociating myself* from something –

---

<sup>80</sup> Using the distinction of Scheler’s, a specific goal corresponds to ‘Zweck’, a *motivation* to ‘Ziel’, e.g., M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics...* I:I.3. *Motivation* is a horizon of values which, on the one hand, functions as a *foundation* for choosing some goals and, on the other hand, becomes *actualised* through their realisation – it comes both before and after the goals.

<sup>81</sup> R. Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*. I: Concerning the political optimism

<sup>82</sup> M. Scheler, *Resentment in the Building of Morals*. The just quoted book of R. Aron contains the classical analyses of a particular form of this sickness.

from *the world*, perhaps, from my life, apparently from that which is *not-mine* but eventually, as a matter of fact, from *myself*. This *dissociation* finds an expression in the opposition between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’, the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’. ‘Inner’ would usually refer to the ‘inner life’ but it may be related to anything which is in some way experienced as *mine*: *my* feelings, *my* things, *my* friends, *my* family. The ‘outer’ is then everything else, everything excluded from this ‘inner’ circle, everything for which *I* do not feel a slightest degree of responsibility, everything which perhaps influences *me* but is not influenced by *me*. The *transcendence* of that which is not *mine* may confront me, for instance, as *my* indifference opposed to care and responsibility I feel for what is *mine*. But it can also emerge through *my* inability to draw borders between the two, by *me* getting distracted, if not lost, among the challenges and temptations confronting me in my meeting with *the world*, the inability ‘to gather myself’. When manifested in *actual signs*, it involves the fundamental feeling of being only *myself* confronted with the rest which, being *non-mine*, is foreign, disturbing, unwelcome, even threatening and dangerous.

The vertical aspect of *transcendence* amounts here to a confrontation with *chaos*. It is not, 75. however, a mere chaos of uncontrollable *complexity*, but a *chaos* in the face of which the categories of *visibility* simply lose their meaning. It is ‘something completely other’, something which can no longer be treated in the familiar ways according to which I can organise *my world*. This *chaos* may, but need not, mean disorder – it is only lack of *objective* order, lack of any sufficient reasons and explanations in the *objective* terms.

The horizontal *transcendence* of *mineness* involves a feeling of alienation, of being confronted with empty and meaningless, perhaps dangerous otherness of *not-mine*. It is something foreign, but something from which I can relatively easily retreat behind the walls of *my home-castle*. The vertical aspect involves likewise a confrontation of *mine* and *not-mine*. But unlike the former, it does not present *me* with a definite, absolute *dissociation* of the two. Vertical *transcendence* makes the *not-mine* *present* in a way which is, strangely yet *clearly*, intimately *mine*. The *chaos* is *present* as a most genuine element, as a most *immanent* aspect of *myself* and, by this very token, can be either a source from which *my activity* draws strength and energy, or else an abyss capable of devouring *me*.

Questions about the sense and meaning of one’s life can be reduced to one’s main achievements, their importance for society or others, but typically they involve one in a confrontation with the fact that this meaning, if any, arises somewhere *above* and is not reducible to any plainly *visible* contents. Kierkegaard’s *Angst* is a well known example of such an experience. It confronts *me* with something totally other, something inexplicable and irreducible to the familiar categories of *visibility*; something which threatens *me* with its unfamiliarity and uncanniness. Such an encounter amounts, in fact, to the question about *myself*; manifesting irreducible otherness, it oppugns the familiar categories and assumed foundations of *my life*. But *Angst* is only an extreme example. Love which begins to penetrate my whole being without referring me to any specific object, which makes the whole world dissolve in a continuity of thankfulness and inspiration can be a good example, too. Love, also personal love, is not anything I arrange, even less anything I choose. It is something I meet, something coming to me from *above*, something *non-mine*. And yet, it does not remain a foreign and merely accidental event which only happened to *me* as is the case with *actual experiences*. Embracing my whole being, it is thoroughly *mine*, it involves *myself* to the very depth of my *soul*, to the point where *I* cease to be *myself*.

The vertical aspect of *transcendence* confronts one with otherness *above*, with something over which one is not the master. It has these two basic forms: of dissolution or enrichment, of destruction or creation. “And of madness there [are] two kinds; one produced by human infirmity, the other [is] a divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention.”<sup>83</sup> Only at the limits of oneself can one become *oneself*, but it is also where one can lose *oneself*. There is an element of madness in every creative genius, for creation – the secondary creation, that of which humans are capable – amounts to organising the disorganised, to bringing *experience* out of *chaos*. Any creative *activity* involves a deep personal engagement which arises only from a confrontation with *chaos*, where *I* meets *non-I* and the border between oneself and otherness, between *mine* and *non-mine* is impossible to draw. Such a confrontation may result in a dedicated love, in a resolute

---

<sup>83</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*. 265b [It is easy to observe differences. For instance, Plato’s divine madness is “subdivided into four kinds, prophetic, initiatory, poetic, erotic”, all related to some *actual* consequences (and reappearing later, with Ficino and Pico, as the four divine furors). But we can disagree on particulars retaining the main idea.]

patience, in new, beautiful works of art or science or in . . . madness. A creative genius organises chaos emerging, like Jonas, after three days from the whale's belly. A madman is, too, swallowed by the overpowering force of *chaos* but, unable to wrest himself from it, remains there or else, if he returns, returns empty-handed.

## 1.4 Invisibles

76. *Self-reflection* discloses my *separation*, but it does so under the mark of *reflective dissociation* – it posits *myself* as an independent entity which is therefore experienced as *alienated*. It centers around the category of *mineness* with its basic mode of *my will*. It was the level at which I could still choose and control and where all my decisions, actions and activities were referred back to *myself* as their protagonist. Even when I feel that, as a matter of fact, I am not in control, I still persist in the attempts to realise *my will*. And as long as I insist and persist in this focusing on *mineness*, *my goals*, *my wishes*, *my will*, I also keep experiencing *separation* as alienation. Even if I recognise the world as *my world*, I do not appropriate it, it does not become fully *mine*. For *my world* should conform to *my projects*, while the world does not.

In *self-reflection* I re-cognise *myself* as transcending the *horizon of actuality*, but merely as some noumenal site of identity. I know intimately that it is *myself* I am reflecting over, yet this identity remains ideal, unexperienced. Indeed, *myself* discovered by the *reflection that I am* is the result of a rather artificial abstraction in which *reflection* dissociated *myself* from *the world*, even from *my life*, that is, from myself. As much as I know that *I am myself*, I also know that the reflecting *I* is not fully *myself*; the *I* grasped within the *actuality of reflection* does not coincide with *myself living my life*; *I am myself* and yet *I am losing myself*, *I am close to myself*, but also remote, ingraspable – the same and different. *Alienation* is more than the estrangement from *the world*; it is first of all the estrangement from *myself*, the loss of contact with *my self*.

77. There are situations where my self-identity, posited noumenally in *self-reflection* as an incomprehensibly substantial property, becomes dubious and as if suspended, if not totally absent.

On the pathological end, many cases of schizophrenia provide examples of a split at the level of *myself*.<sup>84</sup> The etymology of the term coined by Eugene Bleuler – *schizo* = split, *phreno* = mind – does not intend multiple personalities but one split personality: the emotive and cognitive functions are not only disturbed but also *dissociated* from each other; hallucinations or delusions of grandeur or persecution *invade* consciousness of a paranoid schizophrenic; *attacks* of silly and incoherent laughter, grimace, unmotivated giggle are symptoms of disorganised schizophrenia. One hears the complains that patient's intestines are congealed, that his brain has been removed or that some device has been implanted into it, that a slightest movement will provoke an enormous catastrophe (catatonic schizophrenia), etc. It is the patient who realises that some alien force threatens *his* integrity and takes over the control – of *his* mind, behavior, surroundings.

Within a more 'normal' range, there are also experiences when *I am not in control of myself*, when *I* am seized by an impulse, an urge to act in a way which, to all *my* consciousness and knowledge, is not *my* way of acting, which does not originate in *my will*. "The primitive phenomenon of *obsession* has not vanished; it is the same as ever. It is only interpreted in a different and more obnoxious way."<sup>85</sup> An impulsive act, a 'murder in affect' may be followed by an outcry "it was not me, it was something strange in me".

Such impulses and acts, although *mine*, emerge *as if* from 'outside', as if they were coming from some higher or deeper layers which are not under my control, which, although originating 'in me', are not *mine* at all. "A man likes to believe that he is the master of his soul. But as long as he is unable to control his moods and emotions, or to be conscious of the myriad secret ways in which unconscious factors insinuate themselves into his arrangements and decisions, he is certainly not his own master."<sup>86</sup> "We have intimations and intuitions from unknown sources. Fears, moods, plans, and hopes come to us with no visible causation. These concrete experiences are at the bottom of our feeling that we know ourselves very little; at the bottom, too, of the

<sup>84</sup>We use the term in the usually imprecise sense which may cover a large variety of symptoms and their complexes, which should, perhaps, be classified as distinct disorders.

<sup>85</sup>C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*. p.32

<sup>86</sup>Ibid. p.72 [We will later explain the difference between 'unconscious' and that which we have in mind. For the time being, one may think in terms of the 'unconscious'.]

painful conjecture that we might have surprises in store for ourselves.”<sup>87</sup>

Experiences of this kind, when “one becomes two,”<sup>88</sup> make present something which ‘lives in me but is not me’, which is ‘inside myself’ and yet is not *myself*, which exercising often irresistible power over *myself*, stays ‘outside’ *myself*. Then “the greater figure, which one always was but which remained invisible, appears to the lesser personality with the force of a revelation. He who is truly and hopelessly little will always drag the revelation of the greater down to the level of his littleness, and will never understand that the day of judgment for his littleness has dawned. But the man who is inwardly great will know that the long expected friend of his soul, the immortal one, has now really come, ‘to lead captivity captive’ [...]”<sup>89</sup>

The reflection necessary for overcoming alienation (once more, alienation from the world is only a reflection of the alienation from *my self*) is to realise that *I am not the master* – not only of the world, but neither of *myself*, of my very being. My decision to achieve a goal may be opposed by external factors or my own inability or laziness. This is trivial at the level of *objects* (which are external and given rather than chosen) and of *complexes* (where there is always *more* which *I* cannot conquer). But *I am not the master* also in a more profound sense of not being the master even of *my* being, of not possessing even *myself*. My will to be good may never get realised, sometimes due to my obvious weakness or impatience, sometimes due to unclear and hardly visible obstacles; where failure can be blamed on my own incapacity as well as on bad luck. *I* do not decide to fall in love with a given person or not. *I* may do even if, as far as *I* can see or as the course of life shows, the person is not the one *I* would like to love. My hope for happiness may never find fulfillment – not only because *I* constantly find features of *myself* precluding it, but simply because *I* am unhappy. There are sufferings of which *I* can be acutely aware and which *I* can firmly defy but which, nevertheless, last for years leaving hardly any hope that they may ever terminate. There are states in which one wants to say: “Let me perish, let me die! I live without hope; from within and from without I am condemned, let no one pray that I may be released!”<sup>90</sup> There are no *signs*, no visible possibilities of redemption. Despair is to yield to this impossibility, is to accept it, but it is not something *I* choose voluntarily: it happens to me, and *I* only can not resist it.

And yet, one day, *I* may find that all that was ceased to be, that as a matter of fact, *I* am happy but *I* know neither when *I* became so or how that happened. *I* do not even know what it means – *I* only know that *I* am. *I* may find one day that the insecurity or angst which have been lurking in the depths of my soul disappeared and their place took tranquility and peace. But *I* know neither when nor how that happened – only that *I* had wished, that *I* had prayed for that to happen and that it did. “[T]his hell and this heaven come about a man in such sort, that he knoweth not whence they come; and whether they come to him, or depart from him, he can of himself do nothing towards it.”<sup>91</sup>

#### 1.4.1. The signs

##### *Original signs*

79.

A ‘murder in affect’ need not be followed by the outcry “it was not me, it was something strange in me”. It can be just committed and simply through that, by being committed, witness to the presence of a power greater than *oneself*. But this is rather an extreme witness. *Acts* and *actions* are involved in the texture of the world and, possibly, in the broader context of *activities*. In this respect, they may be studied as *objective*, purposeful ways of achieving various goals or as expressions of various needs. But this does not exhaust their significance. *Acts* and, in particular, the ways in which they are carried out, are not determined exclusively by *my will* nor their *objective* context. Every act, in addition to its *objective* context, in addition to its visible content, involves an undefinable rest, a side which does not pertain to its *objective* determinations. For instance, “the value ‘good’ [...] is present as if ‘behind’ the acts of will, and this in the essential way; it cannot therefore be intended in these acts.”<sup>92</sup> An act directed by *my will*, aimed at a specific

<sup>87</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. IV:299

<sup>88</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. From High Mountains (the concluding aftersong)

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. III:217

<sup>90</sup> *Theologia Germanica*. XI

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*.... I:1.2;p.48. «Der Wert ‘gut’ [...] befindet sich gleichsam ‘auf dem Rücken’

objective, has an involuntary aura around itself which indicates something else, often different, than its intention has put into it. Trivialising to the extreme (or, perhaps, complicating more than necessary), one distinguishes the ‘what’ from the ‘how’, as the case may be, the ‘matter’ from the ‘form’, the ‘conscious’ from the ‘unconscious’. With Heidegger the ‘how’ of the acts is not only more important than the *objective* ‘what’, but is the genuine, non-objectifiable site of their ontological significance.<sup>93</sup> It seems that nothing is ever the same, nothing is ever fully itself, that the search for the ultimate ‘in itself’ always encounters some overlooked *rest*, which germinates underneath the established foundations so that “the stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”<sup>94</sup> No amount of intentional deliberation is able to remove this ‘unintended’ rest from an *act*, to reduce an *act* to its *visible, actual* ‘whats’, ‘whys’, ‘hows’. It would be wrong to say that “I am what I do”, but what *I* do does *manifest* what *I* am. *Acts* are not any *dissociated*, isolated and mutually independent events, they are involved in the context of *actions* and *activities* and, eventually, reveal ‘who I am’. Their *rest* (if one insists, their ‘how’), which for *reflection* dissolves into *nothing*, is a *sign*, too – the terminus of the particular trace which, stretching through the current situation and *moods*, feelings and *qualities*, eventually anchors the *actuality* in the *origin*.

80. Being in love finds its expressions in various *acts* and the ways of performing them. In so far as *I act* from love, these *acts* are *signs* of its *presence*. Sometimes, for some people, it may be necessary to know that *I am* in love in order to apprehend the character of the *rest* of my *acts*. But, typically, it is the other way around and the *acts* eventually unveil this *rest*, their ‘what’ and ‘how’ indicate, if not prove: this guy is in love. On the other hand, *I myself* may not know that *I am*, and the *signs* may be much more *visible* to others than to me. As far as *I am* concerned, they are *original* and not *reflected*. *I act* this love, *I am* lead and forced to act in accordance with some *vague* intuition, according to some *invisible command* which *I do not grasp*, perhaps, even do not know, in any case, do not control. Love is not something *I decide* to experience but something which *I experience* (or not); love, perhaps, toward a person *I* would never expect *myself* to fall in love with, love which, perhaps, *I did not even want*. It dawns on me and then haunts me.

Just like a single moment of the ‘murder in affect’ reveals the underlying conflicts of the person going, perhaps, to the very bottom of his being, so a moment of loving intimacy may reveal and express the true love. The expressed conflicts or love *transcend* by far the *horizon of actuality*, they are capable of infinite manifestations and last far beyond their *totality*. And yet, the moment can express them completely and adequately. Love finds its expression in every moment and each such moment incarnates the whole ‘essence’ of this love. Love is always more than its incarnations, ‘overflows’ any *actual* expressions and, at the same time, is fully present in every true *sign*.

81. We should make one reservation. We have used the word “intuition” which, in the usual sense (not in the sense of grasping the unity of a *complex* in one *act*, as in §33), can seem appropriate for the *original signs of invisibles*. Strong intuitions have inspiring effect, precisely by virtue of being on the one hand *vague* and, on the other hand, definite, unconditional. It is this duality of *vagueness* and some kind of definiteness of intuition which makes it so hard to ignore it and let it go. It nags one and, having no *precise, objective* content, can not be ignored until one follows it and finds out what it is intimating. Intuitions are usually only first announcements of something which, in due course, may be unveiled and seen. As Jung says, intuition is *perception* via the unconscious. One has intuition *about* or *of something*. With time and effort, it will give place to specific explanations and *actual* reasons which reveal their place in the *complex* from which they arouse – it turns out to be a *sign* of something *visible* which has only been hiding below the threshold of consciousness. Thus intuition is, in general, relative to a particular region of Being.

The *signs of invisibles*, on the other hand, do not lead to any such *actualisation*. The first *signs* of love may be *vague* and *actually imperceptible*, but even when they become clarified, love is not reducible to any *actual* insight nor, for that matter to any *acts, actions* or a *totality* thereof. It does not reside in *acts* or *activities* but, primarily, in their *rest*. Intuition may be an inspiration

---

[Willens]aktes, und zwar wesensnotwendig; er kann daher nie *in* diesem Akte intendiert sein.» ‘Der Wert gut’ can be an example of *invisible*. Let’s only remind that for Scheler it is first of all the value pertaining to a person manifested, as the quotation indicates, only in the *rest* of the *acts*.

<sup>93</sup> Our ‘how’ tends more in the direction of explicit understanding, towards the *objectivity* of Heideggerian ‘what’. Thus it seems we may be using this pair in exactly opposite way. In either case, both our ‘how’ and ‘what’ belong to the sphere of *visibility*, although the latter touches the ultimate *that*.

<sup>94</sup> Ps. XIX:118.22

to follow its thread and ‘figure out’. Love, too, inspires one before it finds an expression in acts. But its *inspiration* does not end when *I* realise that *I* am in love. On the contrary, the *inspiration* continues, increases and affects my whole being with an atmosphere of strength and unlimited potential, with the sense of possibility to perform not this particular act or that, but any act whatsoever.

Moreover, love is not limited to any particular domain of Being, it is not restricted to any particular object or person. For, although focused perhaps on a particular person, it is love only to the extent it affects, transforms and impresses the whole being with a *quality* and *command*: “love, and do what you wilt”<sup>95</sup> – not a command to do this or that, but a vaguest (not limited to *any* particular domain of Being), and yet *clear* (intense and definite) *command* to do whatever you want *in* love.<sup>96</sup> To what precisely it *inspires* remains undetermined and open, it will be determined by all kinds of details – the *command* is not a moral imperative to do this rather than that, nor to do things in a prescribed manner. It is only a *command* to listen to it, to remember its *inspiring* voice in all *actual* situations. The *inspiration* is *clear*: “Love is infallible; it has no errors, for all errors are the want of love.”<sup>97</sup> But also, since it does not *command* any specific acts, it is *vague*: it “does not perform any works; it is too subtle for that and is as far from performing any works as heaven is from earth.”<sup>98</sup>

The *original signs* of *invisibles* are not any feelings or concepts, are not any insights or states of ecstasy, but *absolute commands*. The character of a *command* consists in the complete lack of reactive character. These *signs* neither are reactions to anything nor cause any specific reaction. Paradoxically as it may look, this is exactly the *command* – it challenges but does not cause, it calls but does not force.<sup>99</sup> *Immediate signs*, like sensations, exemplify the extreme opposite of a *command* in that there the *sign*, the signified and the reaction coincide. There is no *distance* between the *sign* and reaction to it, no distance which could leave doubt and possibility of reacting otherwise, no *distance* between the *actuality* and *non-actuality* allowing the *actual sign* to challenge, to *inspire* a movement towards the *non-actual*. The *commanding* or *inspiring* character of a *sign* is precisely this *distance* separating the *virtuality* of the *invisible* from its possible *actualisations*.<sup>100</sup>

The *command* consists also in that it does not create any particular state like, for instance, feelings do. There is no emotional or mental state corresponding to love or holiness. A *command* acts also when it is not heard and it can make itself heard at any time, in any situation, in any *mood*. Likewise, it can be followed at any time, in any situation, irrespectively of the variations of particular *moods* and *thoughts*. “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at evening, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”<sup>101</sup>

The *absoluteness* of *commands* consists in that they are not relative to any particular domain of Being. Love which is limited to a particular domain of *the world* may still be love but is not the *absolute* love, because such a limitation to a particular region of *the world* is the same as a limitation to a particular region of *my life*. Both and any of these limitations make it relative to this region.

Saying that the *absolute commands* are not relative to any particular region of Being is the

<sup>95</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*. VII:8

<sup>96</sup> Recall that *clear* is not opposed to *vague* but to *precise*, footnote 34.

<sup>97</sup> William Law

<sup>98</sup> Eckhart, *German Sermons* Luke I:26,28. The original subject of the quotation is grace. [M. O. Walshe, ed., *Meister Eckhart...* 29; J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., *Meister Eckhart...* 38; O. Davis, ed., *Selected Writings 2*]

<sup>99</sup> We can say about these *signs* exactly what Bergson says about the mystics. “They have no need to exhort us. They only have to exist, for their existence is a call.” [H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. ]

<sup>100</sup> We might probably go as far as saying that any *distance* separating a *sign* from the signified is a *command*. In any case, any experience of such a *distance* is also an experience of a *command*. In the most trivial case, it is merely the *command* to interpret the *sign*, to understand what it signifies, what this means. Here it has almost reactive character. We do not contemplate the commanding character of a road sign or a signpost – we immediately understand it. But the longer the *distance* separating the two (and it is something entirely different from the arbitrariness of an artificial *sign*), the more insistent the nagging to relate them.

<sup>101</sup> Mark XIII, 33-37

same as saying that they concern the whole Being. They penetrate to and flow from the very depth of one's being, the point in infinity, which is but a reflection of the infinity of Being. They do not concern any being in particular and, by this very token, concern every particular being. But they do so not by enumeration of all beings but by being seated in the very center of personal being and thus are spread over all particular beings a person may encounter. Such *signs* either are given *absolutely*, with unconditional validity, permeating one's whole being, or are not given at all. A person can not be 'partially holy', just like one can be 'partially satisfied'. One can not 'love a little but not entirely', for such a thing is not love but something else.

84. Instead of presenting some recognisable content, instead of providing one with the imperative to do this rather than that, a *command* merely says "you shall love". "For commandments from the Lord should not be expected in matters that have an obvious usefulness."<sup>102</sup> Lacking any precise, *actual* content, the *commands* do not give any reasons either, they do not provide any explanations or justifications. They do not try to convince but merely manifest and ... leave one free. Also therein consists their *absoluteness*.

The freedom in confrontation with a *command* lies in the indeterminacy of *actual* content. But it may be, and often is, announced with an irresistible force. *Original signs, inspirations* may enter one's life in the most rare moments of revelation, moments when *invisible* enters the *horizon of actuality* with imperative intensity. They say that a dying person may experience his whole life compressed into a single moment. But one need not be dying. There are rare moments which reveal to us something fundamental, *inspirations* which may turn out to determine our whole future life, or else, which show us the meaning of our past life; moments, whether in dreams or in wake life, when the content and meaning of the whole life seems to be compressed into a single *sign*. Such moments have a character of foundation, they insert into our time *an experience* of meaning and value which exceed all *reflective* understanding. In the language of Eliade, these are the moments establishing *axis mundi*, founding the *cosmos* out of *chaos*. Although, in our *experience*, we might have lived quite an orderly life before, confrontation with such moments has, then too, the character of founding something which either gives a completely new direction, or else lends extra strength of explicit presence to something which has been only vaguely and implicitly intuited before.

85. **Reflective signs**

*Inspirations* do not reveal any content, do not present anything which might be grasped in *actual* consciousness. But they may be grasped by *reflection* precisely as *signs*. They appear empty since no *precise* content can be substituted for them. And yet, as *signs*, they are not empty. *Reflective signs* of such essential *non-actuality* which never can be reduced to an *actual* phenomenon are *symbols*. A *symbol* does not signify in the proper sense – it merely *manifests*; although it does bring forth something *vaguely distinguished*, its *inspiration* derives from the *virtual signification*, from its pointing beyond the *distinctions* towards their *origin*. The *symbolic* contents can never be sharply *dissociated* from each other, for one immediately and imperceptibly flows into another. What in the Jungian analyses of unconscious is called "contamination" is such a "moonlit landscape. All the contents are blurred and merge into one another, and one never knows exactly what or where anything is, or where one begins and ends."<sup>103</sup> The inseparability of *distinctions* is the main feature distinguishing the *non-actuality* from *actuality*, and it only gradually increases as we approach the ultimate *origin*. We can certainly speak about 'symbols of God', 'symbols of self', 'symbols of transformation', etc., but to the extent these are experienced *symbols*, they do not emerge as so definitely separated as they may appear when turned into *reflective* thoughts. Genuine *symbols* "cannot be exhaustively interpreted, either as signs or as allegories. They are genuine symbols precisely because they are ambiguous, full of half-glimpsed meanings, and in the last resort inexhaustible. [...] The discriminating intellect naturally keeps on trying to establish their singleness of meaning and thus misses the essential point: for what we can above all establish as the one thing consistent with their nature is their *manifold meaning*, their almost limitless wealth of reference, which makes any unilateral formulation impossible."<sup>104</sup> Being *signs*, that is, to the extent they appear, *symbols* are embraced within the *horizon of actuality*, but what they *manifest* is neither any specific content nor any definite referent; it is immediately

<sup>102</sup>P. Abelard, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian.* (123)

<sup>103</sup>M.-L. von Franz, *The Process of Individuation.* p.183

<sup>104</sup>C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious.* I:80

recognised as *essentially* transcending this horizon.

Symbols reflect the original signs, the most individual experience of sacred numinosity, the experience which confronts me not only with *myself* but with *my self*. “When we attempt to understand symbols, we are not only confronted with the symbol itself, but we are brought up against the wholeness of the symbol-producing individual.”<sup>105</sup> This individual is not, of course, *oneself* nor one’s ego, but something greater than the individual himself. Symbols emerge through us but they are not created by us, they are better thought of as “natural and spontaneous products. No genius has ever sat down with a pen or a brush in his hand and said: ‘Now I am going to invent a symbol.’”<sup>106</sup>

86.

Transcending thus one’s personal sphere, symbols have a powerful collective aspect. As Jung’s extensive investigations suggest, humans tend to express the experience of *invisibles* (which, for the moment, we can identify with his archetypes) by analogous, *symbolic* forms and ideas. Whether manifested in dreams, in myths, in religious conceptions, or even in philosophical concepts, the invisible sphere revealed by symbols seems to be the deepest layer of human being, the collective (to use Jung’s term) aspect of psyche, relatively independent from the personally ‘subjective’ context and cultural tradition. The deepest, the most personal is exactly that which, being universally participated does not become a commonality – the absolute, unrepeatable concreteness of incarnation of *invisibles*. To the extent this becomes expressed and embraced by a collective culture, it can happen only through symbols.

A ‘holy stone’, a ‘holy tree’, a ‘holy brook’ are signs announcing the presence of sacrum. As Eliade aptly illustrates, they are not worshiped ‘in-themselves’, they are not ‘the holiness itself’. They are worshiped only because sacrum has marked its presence at these places, because it has manifested itself through them. They are hierophanies, the signs of sacrum which infinitely transcends them and yet is concretely present in them. They may serve as simplest examples of symbols, the visible, external objects which inspire – awe, fear, wonder, reverence – and command, not any specific acts, but veneration and rituals which take their particular form from elsewhere, from myths, tradition.

Transcending one’s personal sphere, symbols are nevertheless the most private things. To be a symbol, the actual sign must be accompanied by the original command. Symbols are only externalised and objectified reflections of the original signs. Here lie of course unlimited possibilities of discrepancies and conflicts between the individual ‘feelings’ of the high, deep and reverent and the publicly recognised symbols and accepted forms of their reverence. The distance separating the actuality of the sign from its meaning is, in the case of symbols, virtually infinite. The relation of signification, once the symbol gets dissociated from the original signs, seems completely arbitrary. Almost anything can become a symbol and there is nothing easier than to ask: Why this tree? Why a tree? Why the cross? Why this and not that? Why anything at all? – and then conclude that there is no reasonable answer. Symbols become ‘mere symbols’ for all too intense reflection which notices that mere signs do not announce the real presence with any forcing necessity. But even then symbols can act as reminders of this presence, whose original signs have been forgotten underneath the visible expressions.

87.

Establishing symbols is one of the most fundamental needs and activities, as they are the only reflective signs connecting the actual consciousness with the sphere of invisible presence.<sup>107</sup> But signs become symbols only when they actually manifest the invisible, that is, only when they are met and experienced along with the respective original signs. What constitutes a symbol is the double aspect of the invisible flowing in through the visible, of the inspiration arising through the actual sign. The inspirations are not any emotions but, without picking on such details, we could say that the archetypes “are, at the same time, both images and emotions. One can speak of an archetype only when these two aspects are simultaneous. When there is merely the image, then there is simply a word-picture of little consequence. But by being charged with emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy); it becomes dynamic, and consequences of some kind must follow from it.”<sup>108</sup>

Reflection devoted exclusively to the petty and all-important matters of its actuality is simply

<sup>105</sup> C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*. p.81

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p.41

<sup>107</sup> Pictures and engravings from Lascaux are hardly mere depictions or traces of boredom.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p.87

unable to meet a *symbolic* expression, even if it meets its *visible sign*. The meaning of a *symbol* has close to nothing in common with the meanings discernible at the level of *actuality*, the meanings of precise words, *concepts* or particular *impressions*. And in the moment the *invisible presence* is declared unreal, a *symbol* degenerates to an empty *sign*. In the moment a *symbol* starts signifying something *visible*, it becomes an allegory, perhaps a mere *sign* ...

Command is meaningful only in so far as it is not *dissociated* from its *origin*. It has unconditional validity only for the one who hears it. The living relation to the *actual person* is its true nature. Stripping *symbolic origin* of its intrinsically *invisible* character (that is, externalising it in an objectified form, *dissociated* from the reality of its *manifestation* through the living person) leaves only arbitrariness of an artificial *sign* and the incomprehensible ‘so it is’. Such *symbols* may preserve some element of the mystical character, but they lose their *commanding* force. They may then function as mere messages, *signs* pointing to another *world* in an indifferent, anonymous way. This is what happens to *symbols*, whether in literature, painting or mythology, when they have been *dissociated* from their *invisible* meaning. They appear as arbitrary. Empty *symbols* are the *original commands* turned by tradition, culture, repetition or personal estrangement into *mere indications*, pointers towards nothing and therefore devoid of any *concrete* meaning. Their originally *vague* meaning and their lack of any identifiable referent turn into lack of meaning and emptiness of denotation. At best, they only try – deficiently and unsuccessfully – to indicate something vague, unknown, which “is never precisely defined or fully explained. [And one can not] hope to define or explain it.”<sup>109</sup> But *symbol* never says *what* it is saying – it only says it. It is a pure expression, totally open to misinterpretation, which in particular means, to being ignored. At the same time, it is entirely *clear* to the one who happens to grasp it, because to grasp it means to already know what it expresses – the *symbol* is only a means of *actualising* this ‘knowledge’, making it conscious. Hence “[t]o the scientific mind, such phenomena as symbolic ideas are a nuisance because they cannot be formulated in a way that is satisfactory to intellect and logic.”<sup>110</sup>

#### 1.4.2. The invisibles

There are things which do not belong to *this world* in the way tools, commodities, situations, daily objects, relations, feelings and thoughts do, but which are from *another world*; world which does not obey our dictates but which is the source of gifts or calamities surpassing our powers. They are from *another world* but this ‘otherness’ is not absolutely foreign, alien – *another world* is still the *world*. Although transcending the sphere of phenomena, of all *actual experiences*, they manifest their presence in such experiences, they too enter the horizon of one’s experience. But even when encountered in a single moment, in a single act of *actual consciousness*, one always knows that what is so encountered is only a *sign* of something that is ‘greater’, something that only *manifests* itself without exposing itself.

88. *Symbols* and *commands* do not reveal anything definite. One might be tempted to say that there is therefore no distinction between the *signs* and what they signify, that the only things made present are the very *signs*. But such a description, which might be given at the level of *immediacy*, is not adequate here. For *signs* announce here not so much anything particular but only the *distance* to whatever they may be announcing. They *manifest* something *invisible*, something more than not only themselves but than any *actuality* of an *experience*. A mere *sign* “is always less than the concept it represents, while a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.”<sup>111</sup> The *commanding* character of a *symbol* does not determine any immediate reaction, on the contrary, it only *inspires* to look for possible ways of *actualising* the *manifested invisibles*.

However, this *invisible* something becomes present only through its *manifestations*, it cannot be meaningfully abstracted from them. When *posed* as a *dissociated* entity, it immediately loses its fundamental feature, *concreteness*, and becomes a ‘mere word’, an empty concept. Its *concreteness* is this inability to *dissociate* it from its *manifestations*, to abstract from them any common ‘essence’ without losing the thing itself. It is thoroughly *concrete* because, to the extent it is, it is *manifested*, and to the extent it is not *manifested*, it is an empty concept.

---

<sup>109</sup>Ibid. p.4

<sup>110</sup>Ibid. p.80

<sup>111</sup>Ibid. p.41

To be *invisible* is to be essentially *non-actual*, is to be a *distinction* which can never be fully embraced – as a *concept* or an *experience* – within the *horizon of actuality*. “The gentle flame of eye did chance to get//Only a little of the earthen part.”<sup>112</sup> *Invisibles* are not any *objective* entities and yet they are experienced because they are present in our *experience*. They are *distinctions* without anything distinguished, appearances without objects, phenomena without the noematic correlates, powers without any identifiable center. Being essentially *non-actual*, the *invisibles* can manifest themselves for *reflection* only through *symbols* – “our only approach to divine things is through symbols.”<sup>113</sup> They “spring from a deep source that is not made by consciousness and is not under its control. In the mythology of earlier times, these forces were called *mana*, or spirits, demons, and gods. They are as active today as they ever were.”<sup>114</sup>

*Invisibles* are *absolute*, that is, they are not relative to any particular region of Being. Their 89. presence precedes any *recognisable distinctions*, and hence embraces the whole person, before one can act and protest. They cast their shadow (or rather their light), as irrevocable as it is ingraspable, as intense as it is *indistinct*, on all particular beings and *actual objects*.

An aspect of this *absoluteness* is independence from any lower feelings and thoughts. They have no well-defined forms of expression and may be present in undefinable manifold of particulars. Thus, they allow variations at the lower levels which do not affect their presence. Love remains love independently from the feelings, *moods* and *sensations* one might experience in all particular situations. In fact, their experiences will be affected by the love which lies behind, *above* them.

Irreducibility to and inexhaustibility by *actual* determinations means furthermore the complete indeterminacy of the form, shape, character and context of possible *manifestations*. There is no unique, well defined range of phenomena which exhaust the possible *manifestations* of sainthood, love, ontological *thirst*, damnation. There are no *objective* criteria telling one from another. This is just another side of the *concreteness* of *invisibles*, of their inseparability from *manifestations*. For though we lack any *actual* determinations, though we lack concepts of love, sainthood, hatred, we do not lack experience; we can recognise them when meeting them in experience.

Each person is an unrepeatable, that is, original source of variations, always new variations over 90. the same theme of *existential confrontation*, which begins (just after *the beginning*) with the *invisibles*. Nobody can teach anybody what love means and how to love except, possibly to some extent, by the very example, that is, by offering the experience of love. Nobody can teach anybody what it means to be a mother or father, for even the best (or worst) examples, may eventually result in one being quite the opposite when playing the role oneself. Even the destitute children raised without one or both of the parents, know what motherhood or fatherhood means, if not in other ways then simply by living their lack and thirsting for them.

This is much more adequate sphere for application of Plato’s *anamnesis* simile than the field of *concepts*, ‘essences’ and generalities. *Invisibles* pertain to everybody’s *experience* and their structural similarity is far stronger than apparent differences in contents, in *objective* particulars. Encountering love, hatred, mystical experience, spiritual strength, we suddenly . . . ‘remember’. We never know for sure, at least not at once: is *this* love or not, is *this* sainthood or not. But the very doubt whether this is *it*, witnesses to the fact of *recognition*. Even if we never experienced it before, we know (*vaguely* and *imprecisely*) what we are meeting now for the first time. The doubt is almost unavoidable because it only reflects the complete lack of any universal and *objective* characteristics, the thoroughly personal dimension of such *experiences* and their irreducibility to any *actual signs*.

*Invisibles*, as the first and deepest *distinctions*, form the sphere surrounding the ultimately *invisible* 91. origin. They are like “the intellection that remains within its place of origin; it has that source as substratum but becomes a sort of addition to it in that it is an activity of that source perfecting the potentiality there, not by producing anything but as being a completing power to the principle in which it inheres.”<sup>115</sup>

In terms of the figure from §1, p.101, the *invisibles* are the most dense nuclei on the circle closest to the origin •, reflecting the part of the line to the left of L and right of R which never enters the *actual experience*. They have no *objective*, nor even objectifiable correlates, nothing

<sup>112</sup>Empedocles DK 31B85

<sup>113</sup>Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I:11.32

<sup>114</sup>C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*. p.71

<sup>115</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:7.40

*actual* can ever fully represent them, no *actual sign* can ever coincide with them. The *invisible* contents may vary (say, depending on where, on the line, the circle is), but the universal fact of primary importance to us, is the very presence of this sphere in our being and *experience*. The structural relation of this sphere to the others will remain constant for a given circle and identical for all beings ‘of this kind’.

Still in terms of this figure, the ‘closeness’ to the origin means also the inseparable connections, dense beyond the possibility of dissociate recognitions.<sup>116</sup> In terms of *actual reflection* we like to consider the problem of freedom, then of truth, then of meaning, then of love, each for itself. But we very quickly realise that to the degree we succeed in such a *dissociation*, the treatment and the results becomes so much more sterile. Each of *invisibles* “contains all within itself, and at the same time sees all in every other, so that everywhere there is all, and all is all and each all [...] In our real all is part rising from part and nothing can be more than partial; but There each being is an eternal product of a whole and is at once a whole and an individual manifesting as part but, to the keen vision There, known for the whole it is.”<sup>117</sup>

Finally, interpreting the interval between L and R as the range of experiences in the circle’s life span, the changes – as the circle moves around – in the sphere of *invisible* contents will be extremely slow compared to the changes in the *actual experiences*. “Whereas we think in periods of years, the unconscious thinks and lives in terms of millennia.”<sup>118</sup> The *invisibles* are the most constant aspects of experience: the movements of the circle involve major changes in the *actual* contents (closest to the point where the circle touches the line), while the higher, *invisible* constellations remain virtually unaffected by the changes of the circle’s position. Unlike changing *actual news*, *invisibles* are always *present*, even if not *manifest* in *actual signs*. This is the meaning of *presence* which is very different from *actualisation*. The latter involves explicit presence, *actuality* of the *sign* or *object*; it is a matter of the specificity of a moment which is dominated by a particular *sign* of a *visible* or *invisible* content. *Presence*, on the other hand, does not require any explicit givenness; it denotes constant proximity of *invisibles*, felt or not, as if in the background of, and hence independent from, the *actuality* of our attentive observation. *Manifestations* are aspects of these *actual experiences* in which presence comes forth and becomes strongly experienced, even if it does not become the *actual object* of these experiences.

92. If we only keep in mind the difference between *experiences* and *experience* (which, perhaps, comes closer to experiencing), we may say that *invisibles* offer the ground of all *experience* and, as such, are themselves *experienced*:

- as the contentless indeterminacy, respecting my freedom, the *invisibles* offer *experience* of *nothingness*;
- as the overflowing surplus and inexhaustible potential for ever new *manifestations* – *experience* of the *origin*, the source of meaningfulness;
- as the constancy of *transcendence* unaffected by *my* choices and actions – *experience* of *eternity*;
- as the *inspiration* and *command* – *experience* of *absolute power*...

#### 1.4.2.i. Invisible or simply unconscious?

Most characteristics of archetypes (with few exceptions to be discussed below) given by Jung can be applied to the *invisibles* as well. They are not any *visible* contents capable of being grasped within the *horizon of actuality*, they are not any specific *representations*, nor any mythological images or motifs. At best, they stand for “a tendency to form such representations of a motif – representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their pattern.”<sup>119</sup> “They grow up from the dark depths of the mind like a lotus and form a most important part of the subliminal psyche.”<sup>120</sup> We should, however, clarify one main difference which concerns the status of the unconscious contents vs. *invisibles*.

93. There are many known examples of scientists ‘receiving’ solutions to their problems from un-

<sup>116</sup>Cf. comments in Book I on figure in §167, especially, §168 and the footnote 270, p.92.

<sup>117</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:8.4

<sup>118</sup>C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. VI:499

<sup>119</sup>C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*. p.58

<sup>120</sup>Ibid. p.25

conscious. Often these come from dreams, like Kekule's dream of a snake biting its tail or von Neumann's dreams of actual proofs of his theorems. Gauss tells about a theorem which he found "not by painstaking research, but by the Grace of God, so to speak. The riddle solved itself as lightning strikes, and I myself could not tell or show the connection between what I knew before, what I last used to experiment with, and what produced the final result."<sup>121</sup> Intense engagement in some well-defined problem will often stimulate the mind to carrying further work, apparently at the same level of *precision*, although not involving *active reflection*.

Fascinating as such events may be, they are of little relevance here. What emerges in such cases are *actual* contents expressed precisely in the categories of conscious thinking. True, they emerge from the unconscious, but it is only the process which is unconscious – the initial input as well as the results are thoroughly precise contents of *reflective* thinking.

A slightly different aspect may be adumbrated in apparently entirely analogous experiences of artists. Klee: "My hand is entirely the instrument of a more distant sphere. Nor is it my head that functions in my work; it is something else ..." <sup>122</sup> Pollock: "When I am in my painting I am not aware of what I am doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about."<sup>123</sup>

Although the process is equally unconscious, the initial input is probably of a very different order than in the case of the scientists. Often, there may be no input whatsoever, not even a hunch, but a mere impulse 'now I must paint'. Although much conscious work may precede and be involved in the process of artistic creation, the consciousness is here concerned with contents of entirely different order than those of scientific consciousness. What is received by an artist is not a ready-made solution to an *actual* problem, but a 'guidance', as if by a 'directing force', during the process ending with the *actual* expression which so, perhaps after a 'get acquainted' period, is seen as a 'match', as a satisfying *actualisation* not of any preconceived idea, but of the initial, vague and indistinct intuition.

This should indicate the fundamental difference: the difference not so much between conscious <sup>94</sup> as opposed to unconscious, as between *actual* as opposed to *non-actual*. The two distinctions are orthogonal, they cut the horizon of experience along pretty independent lines. One can be

- 1.a *reflectively* conscious of the tree one is looking at or
- 1.b merely aware of it (which, probably, would be counted as being unconscious of it, since the fact that one does not stumble into trees, although one does not pay any *reflective* attention to them, is credited to unconsciousness or subconsciousness).

But one can also be

- 2.a *reflectively* aware of the indefinable thirst of one's soul, of a vague dissatisfaction with ... *je ne sais quoi*, or
- 2.b entirely unconscious (only aware?) of it.

Our distinction *actual* vs. *non-actual* is that between 1. and 2., while the distinction conscious-unconscious is, in each case, that between a. and b.<sup>124</sup>

Certainly, there is a big difference between being conscious and unconscious of something. But <sup>95</sup> what matters much more is that *of which* we are conscious (or unconscious), and what we make of the contents of our consciousness.

Freud made unconsciousness pretty much the same as *reflection*, only ... unconscious. Its contents where repressed *conscious* contents. Only for this reason one might postulate (as done,

<sup>121</sup> C. F. Gauss [after M.-L. von Franz, *Science and the Unconscious*. p.383/385]

<sup>122</sup> P. Klee [after A. Jaffé, *Symbolism in the Visual Arts*. p.308] See also footnote I:259, p.88.

<sup>123</sup> J. Pollock [after A. Jaffé, *Symbolism in the Visual Arts*. p.308] (By the way, these two quotations illustrate also the enormous difference between the intellectual poetry of Klee's and the uncontrolled expressionism of Pollock's paintings.)

<sup>124</sup> We gloss over more detailed differences like, for instance, that with Jung consciousness involves necessarily opposites, while with us only sufficiently *precise distinctions*, of which opposites are extreme cases. Also, since our consciousness spans everything from awareness to *reflection*, we have obviously the degrees of consciousness. The extreme of awareness will often be the same as psychoanalysis' subconsciousness. Perhaps the most significant is that Jung's consciousness is the *totality* of contents related to his 'ego', which seems to be simply constituted as the subjective pole of this totality. With us, *reflection* is always only an *actual act*, and the 'conscious ego' is nothing but the *actual subject* of such an *act*. The *totality* of such *acts* *transcends reflection* and pertains to *oneself* but in no way constitutes it.

for instance, in S. Freud, *Neue Folge...*) that ‘id’ should be replaced by ‘I’, that ‘I’ should keep bringing under its control more and more aspects of the unconscious ‘id’, as if the ultimate (even though impossible) goal were to eradicate the latter making all its contents *visible*. The main complication in this extension of consciousness was a complex of mechanisms working to ‘hide’ the unconscious (though always principally *visible*) contents. Thus, for instance, for the dream interpretation, one had to invent a ‘censor’, a function of the psyche which twisted and confused all the *precise* contents of unconscious in order to hide them from consciousness. But the “form that dream takes is natural to the unconscious because the material from which they are produced is retained in the subliminal state in precisely this fashion.”<sup>125</sup> It is natural, in so far as the *non-actual* contents are not expressible directly in the *precise* form familiar to *reflection*.

Even if to some degree unconsciousness indeed hides only repressed *visible* contents, there is much more which remains essentially *invisible*. Jung’s departure from the Freudian psychoanalysis of merely *visible* but repressed contents, and his study of the ‘collective unconscious’, that is, of the transpersonal and not merely private and subjective dimension of the *experience*, is an admirable spiritual achievement of the XX-th century. The *invisible* contents which he finds through dream analysis carry this character of *anamnesis*, of something which, although appearing for the first time for consciousness, does not originate in it and yet can be *recognised*. “[...] I have found again and again in my professional work that the images and ideas that dreams contain cannot possibly be explained solely in terms of memory. They express new thoughts that have never yet reached the threshold of consciousness.”<sup>126</sup>

The assumption of psychoanalysis is that, although much is unconscious, there is nothing which, in principle, could not become conscious. What is unconscious is most intimately present and we are aware of it, although there may be a very long way from this awareness to the full *actuality* in *reflection*. The important thing, in so far as such a ‘making conscious’ is concerned, is that contents entering *reflection* still retain fundamental mutual differences. Becoming (*reflectively*) conscious of a tree ‘I did not see’ is very different from becoming conscious of the vague dissatisfaction I have felt but did not realise. *Reflection*, whether of a tree or of dissatisfaction, is fully aware of such differences, even if they do not become its *objects*. They are *recognised*, so to speak, in the background of the *reflective acts*, in *self-awareness*.

The *invisibles*, the essential *non-actuals*, are not essentially unconscious, but the consciousness of archetypes is of a very different kind from the usual consciousness of ‘this or that’. The difference is established by the *distance* separating the *actual sign* from the content it signifies. In case of an *external object* like a tree, the *distance* is negligible. In case of Prague, it becomes more apparent, even if one sticks to thinking of Prague merely as a *complex of actual objects*. In case of the *unity* of the world, of *vague intuition*, of an *imprecise* feeling of dawning love or despair, the *distance* is obvious and given in the immediate awareness that what one is *actually experiencing* does not capture the thing itself. Paradoxically as it may seem, the longer this *distance*, the more *concrete* the content, that is, the deeper it reaches into the texture of the personal being.

#### 1.4.2.ii. Invisibles, archetypes and intellect

- 96. With the reservations just made, the archetypes carry the characteristics of *invisibles*. They form, as Jung calls it, the ‘collective unconscious’, the unconscious structures which, being *shared* by all humans, are not relative to the individual, personal experience, even if they become *manifest* only in such *experience*. They emerge from *above* (“*inborn*” or “*inherited*”, as the word may go), from the sphere which is not underlined one’s will and control – they are personal but not *subjective*. They are expressed in symbols and rituals of all religions and mythologies. At the same time, they are the most *concretely experienced* events of psychic life, in which they find thoroughly individual expression. Being the most universal in their *vague* and *indefinite* form, they also *found* the most *concrete*, the most individual. When adequately *recognised*, they bind the individual to the collective history and tradition, which provide objectified, symbolic expressions of the deepest aspects of personal *experience*.
- 97. Remaining closest to the *origin*, they can not be differentiated and *precisely dissociated* from each other. They can, at best, be *recognised* beyond the symbolic expressions, always endowed with a

---

<sup>125</sup> C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*. p.53

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p.26

perpetual overflow of meanings which never reach any final form. The impossibility of precise division and description is due to the surplus of meaning flowing into an archetype once we attempt to isolate it from the surrounding archetypes. They simply can not be meaningfully *dissociated* from each other, even if some patterns seem to be discernible. "It is a well-nigh hopeless undertaking to tear a single archetype out of the living tissue of the psyche; but despite their interwovenness they do form units of meaning that can be apprehended intuitively."<sup>127</sup> The archetypes represent the *invisible*, *essentially non-actual* contents, which emerge before, and hence remain forever above the *actual* consciousness. They are inaccessible to the *dissociated* categories of reflective thinking for the "diversity within the Authentic depends not upon spatial separation but sheerly upon differentiation; all Being, despite this plurality, is a unity still; "Being neighbours Being"; all holds together."<sup>128</sup> This *original unity* is no longer *one*, but involves already some differentiation: too weak to be grasped reflectively, but thoroughly real and effective. The *invisibles*, "the objects of intellection – identical in virtue of the self-concentration of the principle which is their common ground – must still be distinct each from another; this distinction constitutes Difference"<sup>129</sup> or, perhaps, *Différance*.

Jung operates with the understandable distinction of the level of *mineness* between man, his psyche and the objective, external world. The archetypes are the deepest structuring elements in the psyche, yet, they are "sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world. [In the collective unconscious] I am the object of every subject, in complete reversal of my ordinary consciousness, where I am always the subject that has an object. There I am utterly one with the world, so much part of it that I forget all too easily who I am. 'Lost in oneself' is a good way of describing this state. But this self is the world, if only consciousness could see it."<sup>130</sup> Consciousness of archetypes, even though it remains in the *actuality* of an act, involves suspension of the *reflective dissociation* into *subject-object*. More importantly, however, at the level of *invisibles* such a dissociation simply does not obtain. Sainthood has no *object*, just like genuine *love* does not have any, they are not opposed to any 'outside' but contain the whole world 'within'. They do not act on any *external objects*, for *actual objects* are not goals of their *actions*, but only occasions for *manifestation*. This constant presence of the rest, of *clear* if undefinable *inspiration*, and the character of expression rather than of directedness towards any external goals, gives a sound, if not complete, account of the unitary and *self-oriented* character of the intellect, this first hypostasis which "apprehends itself and is object of its own activity."<sup>131</sup>

In epistemic terms: "[t]he intellect's thinking is not true because it conforms to or corresponds to the ideas; it is true because it *is* the ideas, which are its thoughts."<sup>132</sup> As we saw already at the level of *mineness*, §68ff., the distinction between *the world* and *my world*, and then between

---

<sup>127</sup>C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. IV:302

<sup>128</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:4.4. The interpreters can certainly inquire into the *precise* meaning of the difference between 'spatial separation' and 'sheer differentiation'. But we can take it to represent the difference between *dissociation* and initial, vague *distinctions*. The impossibility of drawing *reflective distinctions* does not mean the lack of any *distinctions*, and the sphere of *invisibles*, although differentiated, can also be unitary and indivisible. *Invisibles* are *distinct* but can not be *dissociated*, "the Intellectual-Principle is the authentic existences and contains them all – not as in a place but as possessing itself and being one thing with this its content. All are one there and yet are distinct [...] The Intellectual-Principle entire is the total of the Ideas, and each of them is the [entire] Intellectual-Principle in a special form. [...] The recipient holds the Idea in division, here man, there sun, while in the giver all remains in unity." [Ibid. V:9.6/V:9.8] In the language of Eriugena, the primordial causes are one, although their *manifestations* vary, and so one speaks about them in plural. "For there is in them the inexpressible unity and the indivisible and incomposite harmony which go beyond every combination of parts whatever [...] before they entered into the plurality of the *spiritual* essences no created intellect could know of them what they were [...] [They] are always invisible and dark." [J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. II:550BC;550D/551A;551B/C] They are comprehended by the intellect, through which they pass to reason before being diversified by the senses: "everything which the intellect by its gnostic view of the primordial causes impresses upon its art, that is, its reason, it distributes through the sense [...] All essences are one in the reason; in sense they are divided into different essences." [Ibid. II:577ABCD/578A] Scholastics used to ask analogous questions about the differentiation of angels which, although distinct, were lacking material body, and thus seemed to lack also any principle of individuation.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid. V:1.4

<sup>130</sup>C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. I:46

<sup>131</sup>Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §20. For "a principle whose wisdom is not borrowed must derive from itself any intellection it may make; and anything it may possess within itself it can hold only from itself: it follows that, intellective by its own resource and upon its own content, it is itself the very things on which its intellection acts. [...] An Intellectual-Principle and an Intellective Essence, no concept distinguishable from the Intellectual-Principle, each actually being that Principle." [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:9.5/V:9.8]

<sup>132</sup>E. K. Emilsson, *Plotinus on the object of thought*. 2;p.29

*my world and myself or my life* is close to impossible to draw in a meaningful, not to mention precise, manner. But here we encounter the true Parmenidean identity, where “being and knowing are identical because if a thing does not exist no one knows it, but whatever has most being is most known.”<sup>133</sup> Of course, ‘knowing’, ‘thoughts’, ‘thinking’ and ‘being’ must not be taken in the reflective sense involving the *actuality* of an act and *dissociation* of its *subject* and *object*. In the *spiritual* sphere there is as yet no such distinction. The differentiation of *invisibles* is the condition *founding* the very possibility of *experience*, and of *dissociated experiences*. Without these primordial *distinctions*, no *actual objects* could ever appear. Consequently, in the *spiritual* sphere, at the edge of *nothingness*, “being” and “knowing” are synonymous – not because they happened mysteriously to coincide, but because they have not as yet been *distinguished*, because addressing *nothingness* there is not, as yet, enough material to *distinguish* the two. The *spirit* remains, since the beginning, “above the waters” and its *unity* is not affected by all the *actual distinctions* and affairs of *this world*.

99. A crucial feature of archetypes is that they are inexpressible in *precise concepts*, in the categories of *reflection* and *actuality*, in short, in images. They can be *symbolised*, but the characteristic of the *symbolic* relation is the complete lack of the element of reduction, which threatens both every imaging and every imagining.

“This universe, characteristically participant in images, shows how the image differs from the authentic beings: against the variability of the one order, there stands the unchanging quality of the other, self-situate, not needing space because having no magnitude, holding an existent intellective and self-sufficing. The body-kind seeks its endurance in another kind; the Intellectual-Principle, sustaining by its marvelous Being, the things which of themselves must fall, does not itself need to look for a staying ground.”<sup>134</sup> We certainly do not subscribe to the language of “authentic beings” and faint images among which we must live down here. Yet, in some respects, the *symbolic* relation of the *actual* to the *invisible* can be compared to that of an imperfect image to its original. The *invisibles* are irreducible to their *actual signs*, just as the original is not reducible to any of its images. But this irreducibility of the *invisibles* does not mean their total inaccessibility. They are accessible simply by being lived. “Thus we may not look for the Intellectual objects outside of the Intellectual-Principle, treating them as impressions of reality upon it: we cannot strip it of truth and so make its objects unknowable and non-existent and in the end annul the Intellectual-Principle itself. [...] Only thus is it dispensed from demonstration and from acts of faith in the truth of its knowledge: it is its entire self, self-perspicuous: it knows a prior by recognising its own source; it knows a sequent to that prior by its self-identity; of the reality of this sequent, of the fact that it is present and has authentic existence, no outer entity can bring it surer conviction.”<sup>135</sup> Dispensation from demonstration and from acts of faith amounts to their inadequacy which is but the other side of the direct contact with them. *Invisibles* are the most directly accessible because they are the most *concrete*, the deepest and most intimately *present aspects of experience*. It is the directness of this contact which is *actually* inaccessible, which can not be repeated in the purely *actual* categories. The *invisibles* may be apprehended by means of *symbols*, but such a *reflective* apprehension is not the same as direct grasping an *object*. In it, the *invisibles* are as if ‘projected from within’ (which ‘projection’ has nothing to do with the psychoanalytic sense of unconscious externalisation.) *Symbolic recognition* may happen with full *actuality* of consciousness, with full knowledge about the *origin of the symbols*. But this is then a *recognition* of both the insurmountable *distance* between the symbolised content and its *actual* expressions, and of the impossibility of accessing or ‘objectifying it’ by any other *actual* means than *symbolic expressions*. The *symbolism of self* need not be an unconscious ‘projection’ – it may be a conscious expression. But that of *which* we are thus conscious is primarily the *distance*. What precisely is thus being expressed remains vague; it is essentially *invisible* and the scope of *reflective consciousness* can never embrace the entire *concreteness* of this relation. The relation need not be, and hardly ever is consummated under the attentive look of *actual consciousness*. In fact, the more insistence on bringing it to consciousness, the stronger indication of some, in the extreme cases pathological, obsession with the opposition, of the attempts to annul the *distance*

---

<sup>133</sup>Eckhart [after E. F. Edinger, *The Creation of Consciousness*. II;p.35] The argument certainly leaves something to be wished for, but we do not focus on the arguments.

<sup>134</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:9.5

<sup>135</sup>Ibid. V:5.2

and make the *invisible* visible.

What, if anything, is being projected along the *symbolic* relation is the very distinction *subjective-objective*, ‘psychical’-‘physical’; it is projected into the sphere where no such distinctions are possible or meaningful. There is a level, albeit hardly a level of experience, where *my self* is *self*, Atman is Brahman, and where this *really is so*. Sure, any experience is *my* experience, and thus it involves *my actual subjectivity*. As long as we are looking for *actual experiences* as the only measure of convincing us about anything, we may at best encounter only vague analogues, momentaneous experiences of ‘oneness’, mystical union, *coincidentia oppositorum*, which may at best leave a mark as they disappear from the *horizon of actuality*. These are only pale, even if intense, *actual* reflections of something which remains *essentially* – and hence forever – *invisible*. “It is not possible to draw near even with the eyes, or to take hold of [it/him] with our hands, which in truth is the best highway of persuasion into the mind of man.”<sup>136</sup>

The juxtaposition of Plotinian remarks on the intellect and the Jungian reflections on the archetypes is, hopefully, self-explaining.<sup>137</sup> One should certainly remember that Jung and Plotinus diverge drastically when it comes to the description of the contents of the respective spheres. While the collective unconscious contains only the archetypes of the most primordial elements of human experience, Plotinian intellect suffers overpopulation similar to that of Plato’s ideal world. It contains “qualities, accordant with Nature, and quantities; number and mass; origins and conditions; all actions and experiences not against nature; movement and repose, both the universals and the particulars: but There time is replaced by eternity and space by its intellectual equivalent, mutual inclusiveness.”<sup>138</sup> And this is only the beginning, because all items listed so far are only forms of sensible things.

These differences of contents notwithstanding, the similarity of the general characteristics is hardly disputable, and it is hardly accidental. Modern sensibility is certainly closer to the language of Jung than to that of neo-Platonic emanations. But, in general, the differences concern only the language and concepts. It is easier to recognise something fundamental in the dimensions of personal existence than in the conceptual constructions of ‘eternal essences’. But what is so recognised belongs to ‘collective unconsciousness’, that is, transpersonal intellect. Every human being lives this eternal sphere anew and individually, everybody is himself only through participation in the *invisible communion of shared origin*. “Every soul, authentically a soul, has some form of rightness and moral wisdom; in the souls within ourselves there is true knowing: and these attributes are no images or copies from the Supreme, as in the sense-world, but actually are those very originals in a mode peculiar to this sphere.”<sup>139</sup>

The common characteristics yield, as Heidegger would say, *existentialia*: the “explicata to which the analytic of Dasein gives rise, obtained by considering Dasein’s existence-structure”<sup>140</sup>. Even if particular contents seem to vary (though, being *invisible*, one can not expect them to ever yield to a unique and univocal description), the very presence and general character of the sphere of *invisibles* provides such an explicatum.

#### 1.4.2.iii. Form vs. matter

We seem to encounter the distinction between ‘form’ and ‘matter’, perhaps, between the universal ‘essence’ or human nature and its particular instances in given individuals. The *invisibles* may remind of the constant and common characteristics which enter the life only through the *actual experiences*. To the limited extent the association may be legitimate but we certainly won’t accept it in the traditional form. On the one hand, we have dispensed with any ‘matter’ which could provide the individualising material for ideal ‘forms’. The main difference concerns then the fact that *invisibles*, unlike the Platonic ‘forms’, are not any other-worldly entities, existing independently beyond the world of concrete experience. They are fully experienced, and their transcendence means only that they neither are *objects* of *actual experiences* nor are reducible to such experiences. But neither are *invisibles* simply abstracted from the *actual experiences* as

<sup>136</sup>Empedocles 31B133

<sup>137</sup>Remarks on the similarities can be found in H.-R. Schwyzer, *The intellect in Plotinus and the archetypes of C. G. Jung*.

<sup>138</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:9.10

<sup>139</sup>Ibid. V:9.13

<sup>140</sup>M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. I:1.1, H44

their common features, natures or concepts. *Actual* instances are usually too few. One cannot be damned twice in one's life time, just like one cannot commit suicide twice. There is no such thing as multiple 'instances' of love from which one could abstract any meaningful *concept*. There is not even *any experience of love* (even if grammar and habit allow us to speak this way) – there is only *experiencing love*.

102. A human existence is indeed a repetition but it is a repetition of the unrepeatable, it is a repetition of the necessity to live one's life, accepting this most unique and personal *gift*, and to live it from its unique source. *Concrete* life does not amount to 'filling in' the abstract 'form' with actual 'matter', not to mention, with actual sensations. If we were to use these distinctions, we would say that it amounts to actually finding this very form, to forming it by drawing the borders – new or old – completely anew. This drawing of the borders is not any 'matching' of particular contents to pre-existing 'forms'; it affects equally the *visible* and the *invisible* sphere, involving the most intimate reciprocity between them.

We can learn (from others, from the books) to understand many things, some *distinctions* and borders between hate, love, friendship, indifference..., between hospitality, generosity, magnanimity, benevolence, largesse, lavishness, wastefulness, squander... But to live, it does not suffice to *actually know*, we must also draw these *distinctions* ourselves. To draw such *distinctions* amounts to *recognition* and classification of particular *actualities* in their terms, as friendly or unfriendly, as an expression of love or not, as an *act* of hostility or a mere misunderstanding. To live is to *recognise actual situations as signs*. Was his smile, his remark an expression of understanding, of sympathy, of irony, of superiority? Answers to such questions (hardly ever stated explicitly and consciously) are not arbitrary because they arise as the results of *recognising the actual events as signs* terminating the respective *traces*, which originate in and lead back to the differentiated but hardly distinguishable sphere of *invisibles*.

So far, one might probably still see here only 'filling in' the abstract 'forms' with particular contents. However, the interesting part only begins here because there is no 'given' and pre-defined way of connecting the two spheres. The way of classifying the *actualities* affects also the *invisible distinctions* – not by making them *concrete*, because they always are so, but by drawing them at some *actual* limits, that is, by drawing them at all. *Invisibles* live only through their *manifestations* and can be *dissociated* from them only by abstracting *reflection*. I may have a *vague* understanding of what friendship means and then, confronted with an act of minor opposition or egoism, I conclude: no, if he could do *that*, he can not possibly be my friend, he can not possibly be a friend. There is, fortunately, no recipe-book for drawing such conclusions, and this is an aspect of repeating the unrepeatable. We do not live among shadowy images but in the middle of the highest realities. Saying "friendship" everybody will understand (or misunderstand) something, even if we disagree whether this particular conclusion, in this particular case was justified. We do not know where the borders go but we must draw them. Drawing the borders in *actual* situations we as if define, again and again, what friendship – as distinct from all that it is not – is.

We do not know, that is, we do not know exactly and *precisely* what friendship is. Yet, without knowing it at all, could we have friends? After some time, the friend who did *that* and whom I declared not-my-friend, turns out to be a most worthy person whose act followed from the most genuine friendship or, perhaps, from some particularly restraining circumstances or passing problems. Even more, I may not only learn about some earlier unknown circumstances influencing his act but may admit that the act does not actually contradict friendship after all, that its significance is (and always has actually been) much less than what I mistakenly imagined. In either case, he turns out to be, perhaps even to have been all the time, my true friend, and friendship acquires a new 'essence', the border separating friendship from all the rest becomes re-adjusted.

In this tension between the non-arbitrariness of *invisibles* and the constant need to find their *actual signs* lies the whole sphere of *concrete freedom*. It is not freedom to decide and declare, but to find and *recognise*; not least, to *recognise* friendship and generosity where one could see and earlier have found only enmity and danger. Such a *recognition* is a genuine creation, but this will be another story.

#### 1.4.3. Transcendence

The *transcendence* of the *invisibles* consists in their being *essentially non-actual*, *essentially outside* the *horizon of actuality* and, by the same token, *above me*. They are what separates *me* from the origin, the sphere through which *I* am *confronted* with the ultimate pole of *invisibility*, the one.

*Transcendence* does not contradict *presence*; *essential non-actuality* does not mean any *dissociation*, any insurmountable foreignness. It only means inexhaustibility by any *objective determinations*, the impossibility of a reduction to *visibility*, of being narrowed to the *horizon of actuality* and embraced fully by consciousness. 103.

*Invisibles* are something which I not only cannot grasp but not even imagine as entities. Unlike *complexes*, they are not constructed from some simpler, *actual* elements by the power of my understanding. Unlike *general thoughts* and *qualities of life*, which are always relative to one's life, they are not relative to anybody. Although they are *manifested* in one's experience, they enter it as essentially *transcending* the horizon of *mineness*. Sure, they can *manifest* to *me* something about *my life*, but they do it in an *absolute* fashion, as something essential and indisputable, they do it from *above*.

*Irreducibility* means also that *invisibles* cannot be delineated by means of any *actual thoughts* and *impressions*. *General thoughts*, in spite of their vagueness and empty generality, do have content which they partially reflect and ascribe to *the world* or one's life. *Invisibles* have no such content which could be meaningfully, even if only partially, reflected. They are not 'properties' of *the world*, objective qualities encountered 'out there' by reflective thinking. They are *commands* to the individual being, *commands* which either are heard – and that means, heard personally and *absolutely* – or are not encountered at all.

Their *signs*, seen from the perspective of *actuality*, are the most empty pointers, apparently arbitrary and unrelated to what they point to.<sup>141</sup> They are appearances without objects or, as Heidegger might have put it, they appear only (as) disappearing, they become *present* without becoming *actual* – *distinctions* which immediately melt into one another and dissolve in the ever present rest of *invisibility* surrounding all *actuality*. Their whole and only possible objective, *actual determination* is to ... *manifest* – to signify by pointing towards an inexhaustible source, ever indeterminate and forever distinct from all *distinctions*.

This complete lack of *objective correlate* is an expression of *absoluteness*, of *transcending* all regions of Being and, eventually, all possible *distinctions*. Belonging to the personal center, to the very *self*, *invisibles* lie beyond beings but only in the sense of not pertaining to any particular among them – they pertain to all of them, to the whole sphere of *actual*, *non-actual* and *non-actual distinctions*. A person is not holy 'over something' or 'in relation to something' – he *is* holy, nowhere in particular, that is, in his whole being and beyond it. A person is not damned for a particular act; a particular act can only reveal the depth of damnation which has penetrated the person, that is, the whole world to the outermost limits. One is not damned temporally, but forever. *Invisibles* penetrate the whole Being and lend their force and character to every encounter with beings, to every *distinction*. Thus they *transcend* the limitations of any particular situation, hiding the *virtual potential* of ever new *manifestations* like a promise of eternal repetition. 104.

Lying thus *above this world*, *invisibles* do not fall under its temporal dimension – only their *manifestations* do. A bitter, tragic or trivial end of a love story does not mean the end of love. It is only the end of this *manifestation* of love, of this experience. Psychological difficulties notwithstanding, one may be equally able to cherish love, to long for its *manifestations*, to recognise and appreciate it when one meets it again. Psychological difficulties mean only that one tends to lose this ability, not that one cannot retain it. 105.

Independence from time can be seen in all kinds of founding events in which a single *manifestation*, a single 'moment of truth', *inspires* the life (of a group, a community, a person) for all its future. The legendary founding of Rome at the very site where Romulus and Remus had been saved, establishing the center of a new settlement as the *axis mundi* where gods intervene into the affairs of people, even the laicised custom of commencing a construction by placing the foundation stone – are *symbolic* expressions of *manifestation* underlying every genuine foundation.

<sup>141</sup>This, by the way, is the character of all kinds of rituals, hymns, Song of the Songs, love poetry, and the whole vast mystical literature with its songs, prayers and poems – they might be understood as inadequate *expressions* of experiences and attitudes, but not as *descriptions* of whatever they try to praise.

*Manifestation* reveals the truth which is not affected by the actual course of *this world*. Even if, at some later time, it loses its *actuality* and passes into oblivion, it still has left its mark which cannot be denied, it revealed something which remains *above time*, even if its *manifestations* and *actual consequences* may diminish or disappear.

However, although *transcending* thus time, the *invisibles* are not timeless in the way of *objects'* which appear as if in a 'frozen time', on an abstract scene devoid of change and development. They are *eternal* and time does not contradict eternity but only, as Plato said, is its moving image.<sup>142</sup> *Invisibles – manifested through all actuality*, at the horizon beyond which it dissolves into *nothingness* – penetrate also time. They unveil in the sphere of *visibles* the order which remains *above* it, but which also embraces and enriches everything *below*. Every such *manifestation* reveals something *absolute*, something which is not relative to any particular region of Being but which, flowing from its *origin*, penetrates the whole of it. Every *manifestation* of *invisibles* reveals their deepest *immanence*, their involvement in time, their life.

106. *Transcending this world*, the *invisibles* *transcend* the sphere of *mineness*. They are not only neither *subjective* nor *objective*, but also neither *mine* nor *not-mine*. In their true *manifestations*, not involving any *object*, they do not involve any *subject* either, or rather, they *aufheben* the *subject*. Of course, they *manifest* themselves through *me*, through *you*. But *you* and *I* are not indispensable in such *manifestations*, we are merely their possible sites. What has been *manifested* is not changed if it happens to be *actually* experienced by somebody else.

One can wish to attain holiness, peace, love and that is about everything one can do about it. *Invisibles* are not possible goals of any activity, they are not meaningful intentions of one's *will* or *acts*. Intending goodness one turns into a moralist, intending saintliness one turns into a hypocrite. For intending is relative to *myself* and eventually, all transcendental theories of intentionality notwithstanding, to *my will*. *Invisibles* can not be acted but can only act, in the background, as implicit *inspirations*. *Participation* in them requires that *I* do not consider *myself* as the *axis mundi*, or else, that *I* address *myself* only forgetting *myself*.

For an experience of beauty or love, it is not essential that *I* am their *subject*. In a sense, it is enough that they are, that they find place. The *subjectivity* of *actual consciousness* is merely the one who happens to realise their *manifestation*. Creation of a beautiful work of art is a very different experience from its appreciation. But the beholder is given the same *gift* of beauty which was given to the artist, the latter was only the one who *actually* happened to bring it to the expression. *Manifestations* concern everything and everybody, they give joy to anybody who is able to recognise them as a generous *gift*. "If you love a thousand marks which are in your rather than someone else's possession, than this is not right. [...] If you love your father and mother and yourself more than you do someone else, then this too is not right. And if you prefer blessedness in yourself to blessedness in another, that is not right either."<sup>143</sup> Every *manifestation* of holiness, of love is accessible to everybody – it does not have to *manifest* itself through *me* if *I* am to find the deep peace and satisfaction in it, indeed, to experience its quality. It suffices that they are – in fact, even if they do not *manifest* themselves.

107. Either there is *an experience*, a *manifestation* of the *invisible* which also makes me see *my* subordination to what is *above me*, or there is no such experience. This is the character of *absoluteness* which either reveals itself completely or not at all. When revealed, it knows no limits, in particular, no limits between persons who can *participate* in it, or the forms of such a *participation*. It is an inexhaustible potential for ever new *manifestations*, a surplus, an untiring force which, fully realised in one situation, never ceases to look for new forms of *actualisation*, which accessible to one person in one form, does not cease to be accessible to all others in an unlimited number of other forms. Love without any *manifestation* is hardly a love, but in any *manifestation* and, not least, in any failure, love remains the potential for new *manifestations*. Therefore it never coincides with its *sign* because, fully *manifested* as it is, it also immediately overflows the *actuality* of this *manifestation* towards the new ones. In short, an *invisible* is a *virtuality*, potentiality of

<sup>142</sup> Strictly speaking, *eternity* pertains only to the *absolute*, the ultimate sphere of *invisibility*, the *confrontation* of the *nothingness* of the *one* and the *nothingness* of *self*; the *absolute* contentless *fact of confrontation*. But higher *invisibles* always reveal the aspect of *eternity* which has nothing to do with the 'infinite temporal duration', but only with the *absolute* validity which *transcends* time as well as space or any other aspects of *this world*.

<sup>143</sup> Eckhart, *German Sermons* 2 Tim. IV:2,5 [M. O. Walshe, ed., *Meister Eckhart...* 18; J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., *Meister Eckhart...* 30; O. Davis, ed., *Selected Writings* 4]

ever new *actualisations*. This marriage of *immanence* and *transcendence* underlies the crucial feature of *invisibles* – they can be genuinely *shared*.

Just like *indistinct* remains unaffected by all the *distinctions*, just like multiplicity of *selves* is the primordial *communion* of the *one*, univocal event of *birth*, so *invisibles* can be *shared* without diminishing. *Actual goods, objects, complexes* cannot be so *shared*, because sharing them requires some kind of division between all parts which involves diminishing them. (Money is a paradigmatic example but this applies to the whole sphere of *visibility*.) The fact that more people *participate* in *invisible* does not, in any way, diminish its quality, intensity and truth. Love can be *shared* without any restrictions, even if its particular expressions and concrete acts need to be limited to the *actual context*. But an act of love, in addition to being directed and circumscribed within the *horizon of actuality*, has the *rest* which is not addressed to any particular region of Being. If more people witness to it, it does not lose any of the love it *manifests*; on the contrary, it radiates and allows everybody to *participate* in it. “All that is begetting in gods, emanates according to the infinity of divine power multiplying itself and traversing all beings, and its inexhaustibility manifests itself in particular in emanations of secondary beings.”<sup>144</sup> An *invisible* seed has no quantity – like the five loaves and two fish which are enough to feed five thousand people, so an *invisible* grain, of the size of a mustard seed, is sufficient for any number of people.

#### 1.4.4. Self

Extensive empirical studies leading to the identification of some archetypical patterns, did not provide sufficient grounds for Jung to conclude definitely the presence “in the unconscious [of] an order equivalent to that of the ego. It certainly does not look as if we were likely to discover an unconscious ego-personality.”<sup>145</sup> Yet, “Personality need not imply consciousness. It can just as easily be dormant or dreaming.”<sup>146</sup> Indeed, “consciousness succumbs all too easily to unconscious influences and these are often truer and wiser than our conscious thinking.”<sup>147</sup> This unconscious center, or rather, since no center can be discerned there, the hidden source of personality is what Jung calls “self”. Its phenomenology in the symbols of ‘wholeness’, in particular mandalas, occupy a significant part of Jung’s investigations which it is certainly not the place to review here. We would denote all this concrete material as *my self*. As opposed to it, *self* is entirely contentless and, as long as *my self* manifests itself, it remains hidden beyond and above these manifestations. *Self* is the ultimate, *essentially invisible* which *manifesting* itself only as *my self*, remains always above it without slightest traces of similarity to the ‘ego-personality’ – the archetype of archetypes, the contentless limit of all relative *distinctions* facing only the *absolute indistinct*.

As Ricour says, *self* can be apprehended only through ‘text’. If we forget the hermeneutic bias towards the ‘text’ and interpret it liberally as *symbolic* expressions, also experienced *commands*, then the intuition seems to be the same: the *signs* of *self*, by their very nature, indicate *distance* to their origin, they *manifest* without revealing. *Self* *manifests* itself but is itself never reducible to such *actual manifestations*. Its *signs* reveal only, so to speak, its ‘consequences’, *commands*, *inspirations* – not any definable ‘properties’ of the *self* itself. Its *manifestation* “is a kind of understanding and perception of our self, in which we must be very careful lest, wishing to perceive more, we do not stray away from our Self.”<sup>148</sup> Plotinus refers here to the understanding in the moments of ecstatic union but it applies more generally. Of course, the experiences of mystical union are, too, examples of the *signs of invisible self*. But no matter what form its *manifestations* assume, the attempts to ‘perceive more’, to *actually see* it, will never yield a satisfying result.

The *self*, the trace of *birth*, is the source from which all *my personal aspects* emerge and which *founds* the ontological unity of a person. “The Self can be defined as an inner guiding factor that is different from the conscious personality [...], the regulating center that brings about a constant extension and maturing of the personality.”<sup>149</sup> The ‘inner guiding factor’, the ‘regulating center’, and the like, never obtain any more specific content; any more precise description betrays immediately its inadequacy. Just like the coherence and relative consistency of my *ego* and my

<sup>144</sup> Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §152

<sup>145</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. VI:503

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. VI:508

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. VI:504

<sup>148</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:8, 11, 23-24.

<sup>149</sup> M.-L. von Franz, *The Process of Individuation*. p.163

acts are grounded in the unity of *my life*, so the unity of *myself*, of *my world* and *my life*, is grounded in the *invisible* and *indistinct origin*, in the *self confronting one*. *Self* is the point in infinity, the *nothingness* of a point reflecting the *nothingness* of the *one*, it “has neither a past nor a future, and it is not something to which anything can be added, for it cannot become larger or smaller.”<sup>150</sup> The *self*, the center of primordial *founding* remains *above* all specific *distinctions*. “For man does not subsist in these circumstances in which he now appears to be, but in so far as he exists he is contained within the hidden causes of nature after which he was first created and to which he is destined to return.”<sup>151</sup>

This *invisible* point in infinity, the contentless fact of *confrontation* facing the bare *nothingness*, is in fact the origin of the idea of ‘*substance*’. We have opposed all talk about metaphysical substances with respect to the *visible* or material things. But Aristotle and his followers always included living beings among the primary substances, and here our characteristics of *self* may comply with those of a substance. *Self* is independent in the sense of being completely non-relative; simple and indivisible in the sense of being *above* all *visible distinctions*; timeless and unchangeable in the sense of facing only the *absolute*. Such descriptions can also be applied to the *one* which would then appear as the ultimate substance, but we will return to some differences below in 1.4.4.vi.

#### 1.4.4.i. Self vs. My Self

110. We have noticed the occasional difference between *self* and *my self*. *Self* is initially experienced as merely ‘inborn possibility’; *I* can recognise the sphere of *invisibles* centered around the *self* and manifested through *symbols* and *commands* – addressed to *me* but coming from *above* any sphere of *my personality*. At the same time, *I* also meet empty *symbols*, in texts, art, other people’s relations, which *I* recognise as only possible *manifestations* of *invisibles*, as ones which do not appeal to *me*; *symbols* which relate some *invisible story* but a story which is not *mine*, which does not exercise the same *commanding power* as the *symbols* encountered in *my personal experience*.

One might want to extrapolate the obvious difference between such experiences to a genuine opposition between their origin(s). One may, and naturally one easily does, maintain the distinction *mine* vs. *not-mine*, constitutive for the level of *mineness*, also with respect to the *invisible* things of the *other world*. Approaching the *self*, *I* may indeed experience it as *mine*, as *exclusively mine*. But such form of an experience results from propagating ‘upwards’ the *reflective dissociations*. It is grounded in the attachment to the relativity of *actual consciousness* which insists on the categories of *mineness* and *myself dissociated from not-mine*. Talking about *my self*, one tends to assume such a distinction at the level of the *invisibles* as if *my invisible self* was opposed to a multiplicity of others. This, however, is to confuse *myself* and *my self*. It is to apply the categories of *actual dissociations* and oppositions pertaining to *this visible world*, to the *invisible* world which does not offer grounds for such distinctions. *Self* is separated only from the *one* – this is its true and only counterpart.

Everything else, every other *distinction* is *below* it and thus can be, at least in principle, incorporated into it. The ‘*my*’ in *my self* is only *my experience* of the *self*. *My self* is *self* experienced as *mine*, that is, in so far as the *commands* and *symbols* are received with all their obliging force by *myself*, or else, in so far as they actually, even if not consciously, exercise their directing force on *my being*, also while this being is involved in the opposition to *not-mine*.

*My self is my experience of the self.*

*My self* is *self* seen through the veil of *mineness*, even of *ego* and pure *subjectivity*, in short, it is *self* in so far as it is seen. The *commands* address *myself*, and thus they turn *self* into *my self*, but they do not originate in *myself*, they emerge from the ultimate *origin* and mark the ever present trace of birth – *self*. This *trace, haecceitas*, has no principle of individuation beyond the

<sup>150</sup> Eckhart, *German Sermons* Matt. V:3 [M. O. Walshe, ed., *Meister Eckhart...* 87; J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., *Meister Eckhart...* 52; O. Davis, ed., *Selected Writings* 22]

<sup>151</sup> J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. II:533C/B;532D. The definition: “Man is a certain intellectual concept formed eternally in the Divine Mind” [Ibid. IV:768B] might require some interpretation, so let us only add “And I am afraid of those who define him [man] [...] according to those things which are seen by the intellect to relate to him, saying ‘man is a rational mortal animal capable of sense and discipline’ [...] But the concept of man in the Mind of God is none of these; for there it is simple, and cannot be called by this or that name, for it stands above all definition and all groupings of parts, for it can only be predicated of it that it is, not what it is.” [Ibid. IV:768C]

fact of birth. In terms of our figure in I:§167, p.91, *self* is the point of birth, the pole above all distinctions which, as the point in infinity, is only reflection of the one – the spark of the soul, as Eckhart would say or, perhaps, the ‘seminal reason’, *logos spermatikos* which (borrowed from the Stoics) is, according to Justin Martyr, “implanted in every race of men [as if] part only of the Word [...]”<sup>152</sup> *Self* is present beyond and irrespectively of any experiences, in particular, any experiences of my *self*, not to mention, of myself.

As the trace of birth, the contentless point in infinity, one *self* is indistinguishable from others. 111. One point in infinity is essentially the same as another – they are only numerically distinct. This contentless difference of selves reflects the fundamental character of birth as the purely ontological event – it does not involve, as yet, any particular distinctions but only this pure one. Different selves are only traces of different births, of separations which established distinct poles of the same confrontation with the one. Thus one *self* is not opposed to other selves. All are traces of – all share – exactly the same primordial event of birth and confrontation with one. The numerical distinctions and multiplicity of selves is thus a thorough community of sharing the same primordial event.

*Self* is the simple fact of existence, and hence it can not be dissociated from concrete existence, not to mention positing it as any self-subsistent entity. As such, one *self* is essentially the same as any other – they are only numerically distinct. Yet the difference, if one insists, between one *self* and another is just the difference between one existence and another, is the difference between one way (of existing) and another, which is eventually the difference between one person and another, between *me*, *you*, *him*. These differences do not in any way contradict the genuine community, but this will be discussed more closely in Book III: §§121 ff.

#### 1.4.4.ii. The ‘sense of self’

I am my *self*, my *self* is *self*, *atman* is *Atman*, but as we said in I:6.3.3.i, ‘being’ is asymmetric 112. and none of these can be reversed. *Self* is not my *self* and my *self* is not myself. In particular, being *self* is not dependent on any feeling or ‘sense of self’. The experience of the *self* is not an experience of some given identity with the *self*. *Self* is something above me, ‘greater than’ me, something never ‘given’ in any actual experience. At the same time, it is also, and is experienced as the source, as the deepest site of my unity.

We may want to ascribe to schizophrenics double personality. And this may be the case, although it means that we have formed the notion of personality allowing for such a multiplicity in one person. It may, however, seem that a schizophrenic suffers often because he retains the ‘sense of self’, because he notices terrifying elements invading his being, because he becomes afraid about himself and finds a temporal calm in alluding – perhaps in an escapist way – to his *self*. People suffering from the Korsakoff syndrome seem to have lost the hold over personal memories and the continuity of their being seems reduced to only the most immediate, last minute’s past. However, they also preserve some childhood and adolescent memories which indicate that the reduction is not that total. But even if it were, even if the ‘sense of self’ and continuity disappeared completely, we still would be dealing with the same person. If such a person is our friend or loved one, we will try to help him – he is no longer himself as he used to be, perhaps, he no longer has the ‘sense of self’, that is, of himself, but he is still the same person, the same *self*.<sup>153</sup> And when we find out that nothing can be done, we grieve over this person, over our loss of him and over his loss of himself.

Saying about somebody “He is another person”, we always know that he is the same; he only behaves, acts, speaks in a way which is not his usual way. Perhaps, he has even changed completely, he acquired a new personality, due to some mystical experiences, intense work on himself, some personal tragedy. But he is the same person, even if completely different. The same applies to a person who has completely lost his memory, who does not any longer ‘know who he is’, to one with a severe dissociative disorder, to an unconscious person kept alive under a drip. If this person is my loved one, I will care and treat him with all consideration and patience which I owe him – because he is the same person. When we respect the decisions written in the last will of a deceased

<sup>152</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*. 8

<sup>153</sup> Certainly, forensic considerations may call for a more specific notion of a person, or rather of a legal subject, but we are not dealing with such issues.

person, we do it from respect for *this* very person – this person remains himself, is still identical to himself, even when dead. Hmm...

Thus, not only no two persons are identical, the same person may be vastly different from oneself. Just like it is not any *externally* perceived, observable distinguishability which constitutes identity of a person, so it is not either any ‘inner sense of self’. If we feel insecure, we may need some criteria to *convince ourselves* that the person is the one he says he is, that he is not a spy, that my friend who just went out is the same who is now coming back, that my wife today is the same person as yesterday, even, that I am today the same person as I was yesterday. If we feel insecure... or, perhaps, if we suffer from the Capgras syndrome.<sup>154</sup> But what we thus convince ourselves *about* is something different than the mere conformance to any universal criteria. What is it? Where does the idea of *it* come from, if criteria are only to confirm *it*? The *unity* of a person lies beyond any tests and the variations in the possible criteria are as numerous as the number of different people.

113. The asymmetry of ‘being’ in general, and of being *self* in particular, expresses irreducibility of higher levels to the lower ones. But also, the higher level, the more *virtuality*. *Self*, the trace of birth, is the ultimate ontological site. But as we have described in Book I, it is a *virtual* site, which exists only through the levels of *my self*, *myself*, *ego* and *acts* of the *actual subject*. That is, there is no such thing as *self* ‘in-itself’, a metaphysical subject without concrete realisation in the world; all levels are co-existent and co-extensional. We are not four separate souls, but one, for it is not “a diversity of parts – if we have to assert that it has parts – which is distinguished in the soul, but a variety of functions and movements.”<sup>155</sup>

A loss at a lower level need not mean a similar loss at the higher level. My incoherent or inconsistent acts may witness to some disturbances in my *ego* but they, unless all too frequent and grave, need not contradict the latter’s integrity. Similarly, I may suffer an inflation of *ego*, but this may as easily lead to problems in my social interactions as to a realisations of deeper aspects of *myself*. I may lose *myself*, which typically we would equate with the loss of the ‘sense of *myself*’, an existential crises or a personality disorder. But this does not mean that I lost *self*, that I ceased to be *self*, because this is impossible.

Identification of *self* with the ‘sense of *self*’ is a sad reductionism, a psychologism of extreme subjectivity. The ‘sense of *self*’ (which, to avoid all too detailed distinctions and lengthy exposition, we did not distinguish from the ‘sense’ of continuity or of unity) is not something which establishes *self*. On the contrary, it is possible to have such a ‘sense’ only because there is something *of which* this is a sense. Eventually, it is the sense of eternal validity of the fundamental event – the confrontation with the ultimate transcendence of the one.

#### 1.4.4.iii. A note on scattered consciousness and self

114. Personal *unity* is constituted at birth as the fundamental ontological fact. No complete *visible* account of it can ever be given. What we have seen in this Book is the stratification of personal being into levels which, relatively, may be taken as various levels of personal *unity*. Accordingly, *I* may experience being more or less *myself*. Accepting *self* above any particular experiences of *my self*, I reach the most definite and solid *unity*. If I stay attached to *myself*, this *unity* slips all the time from *my* view and appears as a merely noumenal identity – identity irreducible to and unaccountable for in the *visible* terms of *mineness* and of the ‘sense of *self*’ but which, nevertheless, remains all the time unquestioned fact. Engaged exclusively in *my ego*, I become a confused collection of traits, features, functions and inclinations. And finally, trying to account for

---

<sup>154</sup> Capgras syndrome makes the affected person believe that some close friend or relative has been replaced by a deceiver or an *alter ego*. This conviction persists even though one can still recognise all the usual signs – the face, the body, the behavior, etc. – of the other.

<sup>155</sup> J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. IV:787B The levels of human being according to Eriugena (or many later Scholastics following Aristotle), namely, Intellect, Reason, Interior Sense and Body, can be easily recognised in our levels. “Of course, everything which arrives at reason from the secret recesses of nature approaches through the action of intellect. Then that same art, as though in a second descent, goes from reason to memory and gradually reveals itself more clearly in *phantasiae* as though in certain forms. By a third descent it is next diffused to the corporeal senses where, by sensible symbols, it divulges its power through genera, species, and all its divisions, subdivisions, and distributions.” [J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. III;p.172] The divisions of nature from the title, referred typically only to the four combinations of (un)created/(non-)creating, find here most concrete expression.

*myself* in terms of *immediacy*, I become a pure *subject*, entirely depersonalised act of *immediate reactions*, as spontaneous as meaningless.

The more we narrow the temporal scope of attention and the more *objective* we try to be in inquiring into the nature of the ‘*subject*’, the less we find of any ‘*subject*’. The Humean series of impressions provide an obvious example, and so does Locke’s person who, eventually, seems to become merely a “forensic term”. 115.

Yet, the awareness of personal unity makes it hard to accept the attempts to dissolve *self* in a flux of *actualities*. “Guess what: everybody was wrong: there never was such a thing as the self [...]” Certainly, there never was such a *thing*. But one still says, for instance, that “*self* is the center of narrative strategies” or of “narrative gravity”. What center? Why does one find it appropriate to use this inappropriate word? Or, perhaps, “*self* is nothing more than a nominal handle we stick on the thread of continuity that seems to wind through our lifetime”. No matter how much one would like to dissolve *self* in nominalistic arbitrariness of post-modern or neo-pragmatic cacophony, one keeps trying to justify the use of the ‘handles’ and to describe on *what* they ‘get stuck’ with the ‘seeming continuity’. Words do create things because they solidify limits of *distinctions*. But this does not mean that the *distinctions* are arbitrary, merely ‘subjective’ or ‘unreal’. Denying the ‘reality’ of the *self* because it evades every determination and every *actual* description, may be (in certain circles) motivated by sociological observations and preoccupation with cultural abstractions and generalisations, but it carries always the germ of empirical arguments, not to mention the intellectual ambiguity of (self-)alienation and (self-)satisfaction.

The ‘sense of continuity’, not to mention any real continuity itself, is as perplexing for today’s empiricists as it was for Hume. His famous argument shows, indeed, that *self* can not be accounted for in terms of scattered *actual* ‘perceptions and ideas’; no such events reveal *self*, even if some may manifest its presence – the presence, however, which for ever *transcends* the *horizon of actuality*. As “there is no impression constant and invariable”, and so none which could give rise to the idea of *self*, there are two possibilities: either stick to the method which tells us that only impressions and perceptions matter, or look for *self* somewhere else. According to the former, people “are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions”<sup>156</sup> – OK, but why do one need to use the words like “bundle” or “collection”, when no unity is there? What or where is the boundary separating one such collection from another? For something makes it a ‘collection’, this ‘collection’ as opposed to that one. We prefer to see in the inability to *see* any *self* not any proof of its non-existence but simply the limitation of the *actual* ability to see – it does not imply that *self* does not exist but only that if it does then it is *invisible*. 116.

The attempts to bring *sign* and *signified* into an ultimate identity, to conflate action with reaction, lead nowadays naturally to the *complex* of the brain composed of independent though intricately networked neurons and to the minuteness and binarity of their firings. As the theory of consciousness, this amounts to postulating a ‘multiplicity of Is’, one ‘I’ responsible for every minute reaction and bunch of such ‘Is’, each working in its own direction, ‘competing’ with each other for creating an overall, unified, conscious experience and, in the confused cases of self-deception, of qualia. Consciousness thus explained seems to say “We react, therefore we are”. This account of Dennett’s goes back to James’ theory according to which consciousness is not any entity but a function. It has never been entirely clear *of what* this is a function, but since consciousness is not any entity in our account either, we should perhaps grant it some attention.

This certainly squares well with the cases of dissociative personality disorders, some forms of schizophrenia, and the like. Indeed, mental sickness may manifest itself as a dissolution of the ‘sense of personal unity’ and a fall to the level of *dissociated* impressions and sensations. But does the fact that *self* can be dissolved mean that it does not (or did not) exist? It is like saying that, since this building *could* be destroyed, it is not real. But *self* is beyond and *above* any ‘sense of self’ – *I* may lose *myself*, my ‘sense of self’, but this does not dissolve *self*. For *self* is not a thing which can be lost, not a place which can be left – it is the very fact of *my* existence. 117.

Consciousness is a pure *actuality* which culminates in *reflective splitting* of all contents into *dissociated* entities. Sufficient *dissociation* leads almost inevitably to *positing* a *totality* of all the bits and pieces which became completely unrelated. Also *subject* (or *object*) is not any metaphysical substance of its own – it is just an aspect (function?) of *actual* experience. But, and

<sup>156</sup>D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. I:4.6

this is the crucial ‘but’, even for a declared empiricist this can be only the beginning of the story – a deep sense of unity, at least in most normal and healthy persons, is so obvious that one need to try to account for this, too.

118. Simplifying only slightly, it should not make much difference which account of this kind we consider. James says: “Experience, I believe, has no such inner duality [subject-object]; and the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition – the addition, to a concrete piece of it, other sets of experiences [...].”<sup>157</sup> So far, so good; our experience does not happen within a sharp duality of *subject-object* either. But then, consciousness is merely one experience looking at another, it is a relation between separate experiences: “a given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context of associates, play[s] the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of ‘consciousness’; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective ‘content’.”<sup>158</sup> The crucial phrase here is “the undivided portion of experience”, the beloved ‘given’, ‘atom’. What constitutes a part of experience as such an ‘undivided portion’ is not an appropriate question – this is just the way things are, this is how we experience: one ‘undivided portion’ after another. “The instant field of the present is at all times what I call the ‘pure’ experience. It is only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet. For the time being, it is plain, unqualified actuality, or existence, a simple *that*.<sup>159</sup> The *actuality*, now explicit as ‘the instant field of the present’, creeps irresistibly into the language, whether of an empiricist or phenomenologist. It is ignored, however, because it functions all the time as the silent assumption. Consciousness, or what seems to be the same here, subject, emerges as a relation between such ‘presents’.

But *actuality*, and hence all *actual experiences*, are something which happen at the end, not at the beginning. *Actuality* emerges from a series of hypostases as a final result. This final result is the beginning only for all *reflection* and *actual* considerations. Consciousness, or its germ awareness, is an aspect of the *nexus of actual* ‘undivided bit of experience’, not something which is built on top of such *actualities*. There is no *actuality*, no ‘undivided portion of experience’ without being in which, by which, or for which it has been distinguished as such a portion. This distinguishing is this being’s consciousness.

119. A significant consequence is that consciousness becomes necessarily and only a retrospective act directed towards an earlier ‘pure experience’ “and the doubling of it in retrospection into a state of mind and a reality intended thereby, is just one of the acts.”<sup>160</sup> But now we are obviously speaking about our *reflection* which, indeed, always comes *after*.

The usual confusion of awareness and *reflection*, under the common heading of consciousness, makes its work here forcing consciousness to be always only consciousness of some past. This, as we saw, is characteristic for *reflection* – the *after* is but the form of the distance separating *subject* from *object*. But we would not, for this reason, call experience “unconscious”. Even if it does not involve *reflective dissociation of subject and object*, it does involve awareness which is its very life; it is only because I am constantly aware of what is going on that, at some moment, I can stop and *reflect* over it. Awareness, however, is for the most a subconscious and non-intentional process, which for James might easily mean: unexperienced.<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore, we may ask what makes me, i.e., *this actual* experience, look at an experience from yesterday as equally *my* experience? Sure, there is some sense of continuity which, too, is an aspect of *this* experience. I, *this* experience, seems thus to posit an ‘I’ as a subject also of this past experience. Projection, I guess. By analogy? But I was not there then, *that* experience had no subject, which is only projected back from the *actuality* of *this* experience.

120. One may certainly try to connect further and further, but we won’t. What we possibly may get in this way, is an *ego*, a collection of *actualities*, mostly conscious ones, which may be considered as *mine* but are never *myself*. The *unity* escapes, as always, the empirical *dissociations* and can be only attempted reconstructed as a mere *totality*. The intimate relations between the pieces

<sup>157</sup> W. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. I:2 (The “subtraction” refers to the conviction that ‘pure experience’ happens to a dual element of consciousness, so that one can be obtained only by ‘subtracting’ the other.)

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. I:2

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. I:2

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. I:2

<sup>161</sup> This, of course, is a simplification since James was well aware of the importance of subconsciousness. But it is not clear how this affects his notion of experience and, in particular, of the pure present.

(aptly observed by James as conjunctive relations) are still only relations between separate pieces. The very ‘feeling, or experience of continuity’ remains a fact but a fact without any reason or, to put it as a pragmaticist would like, without any goal or function. What is a possible pragmatic goal of projecting ‘I’ on past experiences? Forensic aspects hardly get involved at this level of considerations. Consciousness is thus a function (of what?) which itself has no purposeful function, which merely adds to the *actual* experiences, and always only past ones, a redundant feeling of having a subject which, by the way, comes always only *post factum* to have a retrospective look.

The empirical bias, from Democritus to Hume, James and later, can hardly admit any unity beyond *actual experiences*. From the *objectivistic* perspective – at the level of *actuality* – there is no such thing as a unity of a person; there is at most a unity of an act. The empiricist’s creed – whatever can be *distinguished* must be *dissociated*, because it is independent – with the accompanying ontology of exclusive ‘reality’ of indivisible ‘atoms’ can not, if carried consequently, accept almost anything as ‘real’. The multiplicity of Is, minute, preferably determinable entities, is a natural, indeed, the only possible, counterpart of this ‘atomicity’. It seems to enter the stage for no apparent reason, for if everything is obtained from dissociated experiences, what is the need for any ‘I’? Well, it does not enter the stage – it sneaks in. Dennett, to take another example, seems to distribute the labels “real” and “unreal” according to the following principle: to be ‘real’, an *x* must be determinate, and determinate means that it is decidable whether something is *x* or not.<sup>162</sup> “It is determinate, decidable” is a misleading depersonalisation of the event – *we and only we*, you and I, are the ones who must be able to determine and decide. Attempts to reduce everything to the *objective actuality* of the givens, end up in most intimate, if only confused, associations with *subject*, consciousness, ‘mind’, or whatever is the current sign of the sphere *transcending* the obviousness of the *immediate*. The empiricist is there all the time, experiencing, determining, deciding, and nothing helps getting rid of *himself*. Usually, he reaches his limit when the ‘atoms’ begin to slip out of his view, when the well, from the bottom of which he hopes to dig out the ‘atoms’, begins to seem ... bottomless. But this is only another side of the fact that his ‘atoms’, his ‘reality’ are but a function of this view; not necessarily of any voluntary decisions but of his sensuous, perceptive, reflective, differentiating mechanisms which furnish the *distinctions* necessary for arriving at any ‘atoms’ in the first place. Here, past the bottom of the well, in a round-about way and with all possible reservations, we can join him.

The intention was not to dismiss the attempts to establish consciousness as a conspiracy of cells on the empirical basis. Such attempts, as any other of the sort, may be worth pursuing. On the one hand, such a reductionism is the form of all science and, on the other hand, they may suggest, though never demonstrate, which aspects are not amenable to *objectivistic* reduction. Even if they ever reached the goal, it would be of merely scientific relevance and would hardly affect the way in which one comports oneself, consciously or not, to one’s experience. Even if they managed to construct an imitation of ego from bits and pieces, this would hardly be even the first step in giving an account of the *I* and its relation to the world. For consciousness (whether awareness or reflection) is only an accident of *myself*, is only *actuality* of *myself*, always interwoven into the texture of *my* whole being and stretching all the way to the ultimacy of the *self*, the *invisibility* of the *origin*.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup>The precise bivalence of the non-contradiction principle (often quoted where excluded middle does the real job) as the ultimate criterion of ‘reality’ is but another side of this view. Since self is underdetermined (or even may seem to possess contradictory characteristics), just like are the characters fabricated in the novels, both are equally fictional – at least, according to D. Dennett, *The self as a center of narrative gravity*, D. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, and other writings of this author.

<sup>163</sup>Mimesis (in art as much as in technology) is a driving force of *reflection* trying to regain the object it has *dissociated* from others and from itself. In early days of AI it has reached the ambitions of recreating human intelligence (and consciousness?) by means of formal manipulation of symbolic representations. The inadequacy of the project became quickly apparent as information required for controlling even simplest tasks, like walking the stairs or avoiding obstacles, proved impossibly complex. The later projects of the nature-based AI resolve (some of) such difficulties by renouncing explicit models and designing systems of purely reactive components, where the sheer organisation – without any explicit modeling – allows robots move in real environment successfully avoiding obstacles (e.g., neural networks, subsumption architectures in robotics, R. A. Brooks, *A robust layered control system for a mobile robot*, R. A. Brooks, *Intelligence without representation*, M. J. Mataric, *Behavioral synergy without explicit integration*.) Of course, renouncing representation one loses the possibility of treating the factors which are not immediately given. But one might see in this development an expression of the fact (if not the insight) that there is no such thing as ‘pure intelligence’, ‘consciousness in-itself’; that whatever thinking is, is inseparable from the being (nature) which thinks; even though one has not yet said that to create human

#### 1.4.4.iv. Source of unity

122. The question how the unity of *myself* arises from the multiplicity of ‘perceptions’, ‘impressions’, or ‘ideas’ is as irresolvable on the basis of *reflection*, as the question about this unity arising from an interplay of various areas of brain, from a conspiracy of cells, patterns of firing neurons, etc. It is irresolvable because it arises from the antinomous attempt to reduce the experienced – and yes! known – *invisible self* to the *objective* categories. The best it can do is to search for some principle of consistency, reason for cooperation, *visible* explanation of...the ‘sense of self’. This sense, like any other sense, may have various explanations which never touch the issue. For personal *unity* precedes *reflection*, and *founds* the latter’s unity: I am the same being not only in any particular moment of *reflective attention*, but also through all the day, whole two weeks in Prague, all my life. This *unity* is not an identity constructed from smaller, more manageable pieces. It is ontologically *founded by birth* – the primordial event of *separation* – which precedes any other *distinctions*. And having happened ‘up there’, *in illo tempore*, against the background of *nothingness*, it remains ingraspable and inexplicable by means of later *distinctions*. It remains *above me*, which in particular means, *above all my feelings, perceptions, concepts, senses*.<sup>164</sup>
123. *Reflection* is never identical to its *object*. It is identical to, or better, it *is* the act of *reflecting*, and in the immediate *self-awareness* *I* recognise this identity. In a more concrete way, *I* can direct my *reflection* onto *myself* – then *I* become immediately aware that what *I* am reflecting over is *me*, the one who is reflecting. However, this identity remains for *self-reflection noumenal* because its true site lies beyond it: it stretches across the *actualities* which *reflection dissociates* in the very moment it is asking about their unity. The aspects of *myself* I can bring forth in *self-reflection, general thoughts and qualities of my life*, appear as accidents of some ultimate *self*. Whether the *self* remains only an ideal, unexperienced and, as many an empiricist would say, ‘unreal’ construction or, on the contrary, a *concrete* and most intimate presence, depends on *myself*, on the way *I* decide to guide *my reflection* and which *signs* *I* decide to accept. The two possible responses to the experienced irreducibility of *self*, and even of *myself*, to the *objective* determinations are: impossible to re-construct hence unreal; or irreducible because more genuine.

When I reflect over the *self* re-cognising it as the *foundation* of my *unity*, this *unity* is no longer relative to my *subjectivity*, it is no longer an *objective* identity consummated within the *horizon of actuality*. Cartesian *Cogito*, just like Kantian unity of apperception and all the similar attempts to obtain personal identity from the mere *acts* or the structure of *actual consciousness*, never managed to arrive at anything except that from which they started: the *immediate self-identity* of a *self-reflective act*. In such an *act*, *I* re-cognise that it is *my self*, but *I* also know that it is more than *myself*. And *I* definitely know that it is more than what is *actualised* in this mere *act of self-reflection*. I am the same and different from myself. The *unity*, not the identity, becomes *manifest* as the *origin of myself*, as the deepest source of my being – *I* am only its *visible effect* and the unity of my *act* is only a final hypostasis of the *founding process* originating from the unitary and unique *self*.

The *signs* of personal *unity* may be hardly *visible*, its *experience* may have hardly any *actual* reasons, in fact, one may be completely unable to re-construct this *unity* from the bits and pieces of *actual observations*. But this need not mean that there is no such thing, only that, if there is, one should not look for it among the *objects of experiences*, let alone at the level of *immediate* and decidably determinate, that is *ideal* and *idealised precision*.

---

intelligence, consciousness, etc. one has to create a human being. Leaving such projects to doctors Frankenstein, we could perhaps observe that there is a very old, efficient and even pleasant (though hardly *reflective*) way of ‘creating copies’ of human beings.

<sup>164</sup>One tends to interpret the (even less than one hour old) neonates’ responses of imitation of facial gestures as expressions of a genuine presence of a separate – even if only proprioceptive – self, lived as distinct from the environment where the gestures to be imitated occur (e.g., A. Meltzoff, M. K. Moore, *Imitation of facial and manual gestures by human neonates*, A. Meltzoff, M. K. Moore, *Newborn infants imitate adult facial gestures*, A. Meltzoff, M. K. Moore, *Imitation in newborn infants*, S. Gallagher, A. Meltzoff, *The earliest sense of self and others...*). We are not interested in precise timing of events; *birth*, which is the constitution of *self*, may be the moment of conception. But the fact that even psychological research draws the empirically discernible border of the emergence of (a residual *nexus* of) self to the few minutes after birth, accords with our view much better than the earlier estimates (e.g., of J. Piaget, *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood*, followed by M. Merleau-Ponty, *The child’s relations with others*) which denied the possibility of such an imitation before some late months of the first year.

#### 1.4.4.v. Descriptive vs. normative self

There is a long spiritual tradition according to which all who merely live their lives without any spiritual concentration and effort do not attain any genuine unity but are only collections of separate and independent 'Is', drives and desires, bits of consciousness. 124.

Visions (true, of God, but in His terrifying rather than benevolent aspect) often involve almost demonic manifold of strange, incoherent creatures which appear and act in a dreadful autonomy. "And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. [...] As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four."<sup>165</sup> The eye, Jung observes, "is a symbol as well as an allegory of consciousness."<sup>166</sup> Quite common motif is not only that of the Eye of God, but also of the multiplicity of eyes, for instance, as fishes' eyes which "are tiny soul-sparks from which the shining figure of the filius [divine child] is put together."<sup>167</sup> Also, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."<sup>168</sup>

It would be too optimistic to draw any definitive conclusions from such examples, but they may be viewed as witnesses to the old acquaintance with the possibility, and even actuality, of single aspects of the whole possessing, or acquiring, autonomy in their functioning. It may be easily recognised in daily experience. At one moment, I think or feel this, at another that, and for the most I do not even remember what I did a moment ago. I make a promise today, and in two weeks I forget what I promised, the situation has changed so that I act as if I never promised anything. I go around *thinking* that I am one and the same person but, on a closer *reflection*, there is nothing *actual* which could account for, let alone justify, this unity. It appears dissolved in the multiplicity of transient moods, feelings, thoughts, reactions.

What matters is not that such descriptions can be refined to a theory which could even appear plausible. What matters is if it is a complete and satisfying description. There is no question about sick, or merely disastrous phenomena. As a bushman may 'lose his soul', so *I* may lose contact with *my self*, *I* may lose *myself*, dissolve into a multiplicity of egos, and suffer the associated personal and social problems. (Or, perhaps, it would only be suffering of some of these egos?) The multiple egos can retain the character of selves, and even degenerate into autonomy of various lower functions. But even if *objectively* the relative autonomy of various lower functions is a fact, it would not help me (that is, them) the least even to lit a cigarette when I am (they are) feeling like having one (which one? what one?). The actual multiplicity of egos and their relative autonomy is a fact which only calls for the stronger active effort in order to maintain *concrete unity* of being. It would be hard to deny relative autonomy of various lower functions, not to mention cellular or even molecular processes in the body. But if we forget the little word "relative", if such an autonomy is a *dissociation* of elements unrelated into any unifying whole, it becomes like ... demons which threaten, as they always did, with the abruptness of their uncoordinated movements, as when they "went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water."<sup>169</sup>

We said that *self* is the ontological *foundation* of the unity of the person, and then that it is independent from any sense *I myself* might have of it. Yet, a strong personality will have a strong 'sense of self' and it is certainly desirable to have such a sense. This sense, the 'inborn possibility' of the experience of such a *unity*, of continuous and lasting presence, is something we may recognise as the normative aspect of the *self*. This normative aspect is but a reflection of the ontological *founding*, it is a call "Become yourself!", a call to *concretely* realise the ontological anchoring of *myself* in *self*, to live *concretely*, also in *visible* terms, the unity *founded* in the *self*. For it is from *self*, from "this central nucleus (as far as we know today), [that] the whole building up of ego consciousness is directed, the ego apparently being a duplicate or structural 125.

<sup>165</sup>Ezek. I:6,18

<sup>166</sup>C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. II:47

<sup>167</sup>Ibid. II:46

<sup>168</sup>Prov. XV:3

<sup>169</sup>Mat. VIII:32. It is tempting to quote several fragments of Empedocles: "Limbs wandered alone./Creatures with rolling gait and innumerable hands./Many creatures were created with a face and breast on both sides; offspring of cattle with fronts of men, and again there arose offspring of men with heads of cattle; and [creatures made of elements] mixed in part from men, in part from female sex, furnished with hairy limbs." [DK 31B58/60/61 ] These might, perhaps, be only images of creatures arising from the mixture of elements. "But in Wrath they are all different in form and separate, while in Love they come together and long for one another." [DK 31B21]

counterpart of the original center.”<sup>170</sup> “But this larger, more total aspect of the psyche appears first as merely an inborn possibility. [...] How far it develops depends on whether or not the ego is willing to listen to the messages of the Self.”<sup>171</sup> The ‘inborn possibility’, the *self*, is felt and experienced only as *my self* and that only to the extent that *inspirations* and *symbols*, which communicate something to *me*, are received as *manifestations* of something which is in constant need of *actualisation*. There is a long *distance* separating the ‘inborn possibility’ from the *actual challenge*, and the *actual challenge* from truly and *concretely* becoming *one self*.

As far as the experience and *reflection* focused exclusively on the *actual* contents are concerned, the *self*, *my unity* remains merely an ideal noumen. “The actual process of individuation – the conscious coming-to-terms with one’s own inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self – generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it. This initial shock amounts to a ‘call’, although it is not often recognised as such.”<sup>172</sup> Recognising it as a call means to recognise a *symbol* as a *command*, a *command* to *myself*. The challenge may seem abstract in its *vagueness*, but it is the most *concrete command* of becoming *one self*, of seeking a *concrete foundation* of the *unity* of a person, as distinguished from the merely ontological *foundation*. Unlike the latter, the former is not something simply given by nature – rather, it is a possibility which nature only opens before man. But even without going into any attempts to achieve it (which might have moral, rather than ontological or epistemological flavour), we can not forget that all *objective*, reductionistic attempts are still *trying to account* for the unity (which would hardly be called an “illusion” if it were not experienced). Certainly, *I* am often inconsistent, *I* have opposite tendencies and drives, *I* often act incoherently, etc. But it is all the time *I* who act, *I* who have these tendencies, *I* who realise their conflicting force. All *my* spiritual deficiencies notwithstanding, *I am myself*, *I do have experience of myself* and this is not merely a pure *actual* experience, but experience which *I carry with me through ... the whole life*. It is much more ‘real’ than the firing neurons and, from the point of view of experience, much more important, even if not as curious as brain’s possible workings. The principle of uncertainty does not at all affect my experience of *this* being *precisely* at this point at *precisely* this time, and other laws of quantum physics, true and relevant as they may be, are equally indifferent for my way of handling physical objects. “We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched.”<sup>173</sup> Any reductionistic account of person, if it were ever obtained, would have no influence on our experience of personal being, moral responsibility, etc., except, possibly, of inflicting a temporary confusion in some intellectual circles.

#### 1.4.4.vi. My self, self and one

126. The *transcendence* of *invisibles* does not any longer offer grounds for distinguishing its *horizontal* and *vertical* dimensions. It may acquire horizontal character when, for instance, viewed only through the *reflective*, *symbolic signs*. To the extent *symbols* are empty, they do leave a space for progress, they do call for being ‘completed’. But true *symbols*, the ones which are experienced along with the *commands* and *inspirations* of the *original signs*, reveal only pure and simple *transcendence* of essential *non-actuality*. *My self* is the field of *invisibles* and *self* is, so to speak, its peak. *One* is beyond even that. We comment now on these three stages of ultimate *transcendence*, but first observe their constant presence.

*Self*, essentially and ultimately *non-actual*, is present only through *my self*. Being only *virtual origin*, it does not ‘exist’ without *my self* nor other, lower levels of *myself*; to the extent it appears, it does so only through some more or less discernible, though hardly ever *precise* contents. Moreover, as *haecceitas*, the ever *present trace of birth*, *self* is the constantly *present* aspect of my all being, whether it is itself experienced or not. This presence (one would almost like to say, the “*immanent presence*”, though this could appear a *contradictio in adiecto*) does not contradict the *non-actual transcendence*, as the *reflection* capable only of flat oppositions and contradictions would like it. *Immanence* is *actuality* and, strictly speaking, one can *posit* an insurmountable contradiction. But *actuality* is always surrounded by the rest, the *invisible horizon* or, perhaps, the *horizon of invisibility* which, *non-actual* and *non-actualisable*, permeates with its presence

<sup>170</sup>M.-L. von Franz, *The Process of Individuation*. p.169

<sup>171</sup>Ibid. p.163 [‘Ego’ in Jungian psychoanalysis is a mixture of what we call “ego” and “I” or “myself”.]

<sup>172</sup>Ibid. p.169

<sup>173</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. 6.52

the whole *actuality*. This presence of *self* (or the whole world, or *my world*, even of God) is not *actuality-in-person*, exhaustive and full presence of the given. Yet, permeating and affecting the *immanence*, it can be ascribed if not the *immanence* as such, then at least presence through and within the *immanence*.<sup>174</sup>

*My self* is *self* but being is asymmetric and so *self* is not *my self*. *My self* is *self* to the degree the latter emerges as *mine*. At first, the contents of experiences of *my self* tend to be identified with *self*. But no matter how little or much contents *I* manage to discern in such experiences, the *self* seems never exhausted by them. *I* can never grasp it. True, contents may *manifest* some truth, they may suggest some kind of direction but even although not *mine* in this sense, they are directed to *me* and are what makes *self my self*. No *self*, however, appears. *Self* can never be content of any experience and saying that *my self* is *my* experience of *self*, the “of” must not be taken as indicating the content, not to mention the *object* of the experience. *Self* is an *invisible aspect* of every experience. In the particular experiences of *my self* it is an *aspect* which also becomes *manifest*, but its *manifestation* is then not related to their content. It is *present* only as their force: irresistible, binding, *absolute*. Experiences themselves may be entirely *vague* because the *objectivity* of their content is close to nil. It is only the shaking intensity, the tremendous power, the immediately recognisable significance of such experiences – of revelations, founding events, archetypal dreams – which, clothed in the more definite contents of *my self*, signal the presence of the *transcendent self* beyond any discernible contents.

This power and intensity, irrespectively of the content, is what makes such experiences the calls, the *commands*. They make *self* appear as a challenge beyond *my self*; the challenge which tradition formulates as “Become yourself”, but which we would have to at least parse differently as “Become your self”, and preferably rephrase as “Become self.” The adolescent questions “Who am I?”, “Who am I actually, really?” are in a sense expressions of the call, although the call which does not necessarily come as a particular experience at any definite time. They expect answers, expect to find something which one could *see*, some *actual ‘what’* which distinguishes *me* from others – and thus dissolve in egotic divagations. Such questions do not help answering the call, although they may be a stage towards it. For what is *commanded* is to forget *oneself*, to stop *dissociating my self* from *self* without, of course, denying the distinction between the two; to realise the being *I* have always been, but which is not and never will be *me*. *Self* is the ‘inborn possibility’ of *my self*. But as long as *I* insist on *mineness of self*, *I* still ascribe irrefutable and uncontested validity to the categories of *visibility*, *I* still try to accommodate the higher to the lower.

Now, we have been speaking about *commands* and *inspirations* in the plural form. But the differences between various *commands* concern only their content. This may, to some extent, mean ‘what’ they *command*, but primarily it means only the circumstances under which they occur and the way in which they are received and interpreted. Certainly, *distinctionless Angst* is a different experience from, equally *distinctionless*, mystical union; the sudden feeling that ‘I am not living *my life*’ is very different in content from the religious experience of God’s presence. Yet, as *commands* they do not command anything particular, and to the extent they do, it is close to impossible to say what. One rather experiences only *that* something has happened, something ultimately significant has visited the sphere of *actuality*, but *what* was it? And although it may be easy to accept *that* I should become (my) *self*, it is hardly possible to say *what* that possibly might mean.

All *commands*, irrespectively of the differences in content are, eventually, this one *command*: “Become self”. Because all the *traces* – of *my* experiences, of *my life*, of *my self* – lead to and gather in the center of *self* which is their *unity*. Following these *traces* means to participate in their *origin*.

The archetypes (like the primordial causes or intelligibles of the intellect) form a kind of ‘field’,

<sup>174</sup>“The principal causes, then, both proceed into *the things of which* they are causes and at the same time do not depart from their Principle [...]” [J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. II:551D/552A] Just like *self* exists only through *my self*, without being the latter, so “our reason for saying that the primordial causes are co-eternal with God is that they always subsist in God without any beginning in time, and our reason for saying that they are not in all respects co-eternal with God is that they receive the beginning of their being not from themselves but from their Creator.” [Ibid. II:561D/562A] The arguments for and against Eriugena’s pantheism and for or against his theism could probably be directed for or against our exposition. The fact that he makes it close to impossible to distinguish between the alternatives seems to us the fundamental strength – and not any weakness – of his exposition.

various points of which may be ‘activated’, but which remains essentially unitary. The archetypes are so intimately interconnected that ‘activation’ of one will almost necessarily lead to ‘activation’ of another. They are distinct, but are hardly distinguishable, and if so, then only in reflection or partial experiences, but not in their operation. One archetype leads inevitably to another and, eventually, to the most primordial ‘archetype of all archetypes’, ‘archetype of wholeness’ – *self*.<sup>175</sup> Irrespectively of the differences in the experiences of archetypes, of primordial causes, of *invisibles* of *my self*, what emerges behind them is the ultimate site of *invisibility*, the *non-actualisable*, ever *transcendent self*. In rare lives the two could almost be pronounced one, there Atman is Brahman, the Son is the Father. In such lives the *distinctions* of *myself* and *my self* cease to veil the *self*.

129. But unveiling is not *actualising*, and *self* remains forever above any distinctions with the exception of the first: *separation* from the *one*. For *one* *transcends self* just as *self transcends my self*.

“It is only through the psyche that we can establish that God acts upon us, but we are unable to distinguish whether these actions emanate from God or from the unconscious. We can not tell whether God and the unconscious are two different entities. [...] there is in the unconscious an archetype of wholeness [...] Strictly speaking, the God-image does not coincide with the unconscious as such, but with [...] this] special content of it, namely the archetype of the Self.”<sup>176</sup>

*Self* is by no means the same as unconscious or psyche, but this quotation goes through without much further ado. We can neither see nor tell whether *self* and Godhead are distinct and if so, what distinguishes the two. The *self*, ‘the archetype of wholeness’ is, in fact, the archetype of all archetypes, the *invisible origin*, so often and naturally *symbolised* as a mere point, shall we say, the point in infinity? It is the point of *origin* which lies *above* all possible *distinctions*. The only point present from the very beginning, the *trace of birth*. There is no way to say whether something comes from *self* or from *one* because everything, originating from the latter, comes only through the former.

But although we may be unable to distinguish whether some actions emanate from God or from the unconscious, we are very far from identifying the two. Individual psyche, the level of *mineness* with all manifest *visibility* of feelings, thoughts and experiences can be conflated with God only by a psychological reductionism. It is only the *self*, hidden beyond and *above* all *visibles* and *invisibles*, that comes closer to *one*; not, however, so close that it can be identified with it.

Our scheme will claim the difference between *self* and *one*; the difference established by *birth* which constitutes *self* as the God-image: the *nothingness* of the point which is the whole and only reflection of infinity of the line, of the *nothingness* of *one*. And then, differentiation of life and thought which, distinguishing the *indistinct*, conducts a constant dialogue (sometimes fight) in which it reflects the *one*. Everything is but a reflection of *one* and thus *one* is always *present* (I:6.3.3.ii), it is *present* only through *self*, and *self* is *one* because it is *separated* only from *one*. But *one* is not *self*. The *separation*, *birth* is exactly what establishes the *confrontation* of *self* with the ultimate *transcendence*, and what precludes their coincidence – precludes, that is, until death, which is the only return of coincidence, *indistinctness*. *Birth* does not establish a being which then, somehow, becomes *confronted* with *transcendence*. The separation of *birth* is *nothing more* than such a *confrontation*. There is no substance, no essence, nothing more to this fundamental aspect of being *self*, than being alive, that is, being *confronted* with the *transcendence*, *distinguishing* the *indistinct*. If the essence of *one* is *that* it is, the essence of *self* is *confrontation* with *that*. This *separation*, and the eternal primacy of *one*, is what we can understand by *one*’s ultimate *transcendence*.

#### 1.4.4.vii. Ambiguities of objective-subjective

130. Now, *self* as the *trace* of particular *birth*, and even more *my self* as *my experience of self*, seems most subjective: it can never be grasped through the *actual*, *objective* categories, it can never be reduced to whatever *actual signs* announce about it. But at the same time, being essentially *non-actual*, it is most objective – not because it is *external* (which it is not) but because it is essentially *invisible*, lies beyond the *horizon of actuality* and, hence, beyond the *horizon* of any subjective

<sup>175</sup>A simple and concise account may be found in M.-L. von Franz, *On Divination and Synchronicity* Lecture III.

<sup>176</sup>C. G. Jung, *The Answer to Job*. [after E. F. Edinger, *The Creation of Consciousness*.p.67]

control – “man infinitely transcends man.”<sup>177</sup> *Self* can be listened to but not commanded. It is the place of *incarnation*, the most intimate, deepest source of every *manifestation* of *invisibles* and the *origin* of every appearance. Thus, perhaps, the deep “subjectivity is truth”, not because there *subject* and *object* finally coincide but because there, in the *virtual nexus*, lies the origin of this, and every other, distinction.

This ambiguity lies deeply in the usage of the word “objectivity”. We tend to think of it as physically external things. This crude materialism (followed necessarily by some form of psychologism, as it must reduce all concepts, even mathematics, to ‘subjectivity’) is expanded a bit by thinking of objectivity as that which exists independently from me, what is ‘outside’. Here comes the crucial ambiguity, for what is independent from or ‘outside’ me depends on what is understood by the word “me”. One will typically understand by it *myself*, the horizon of things, feelings, experiences which are classified according to the category of *mineness* as opposed to what is *not-mine*. This category comes very close to that of will, that is, *my will* and, eventually, of control and mastery. Things are *mine* to the extent *I* have a sense of mastery over them or, in the most vulgar sense, to the extent *I* possess them.

But then what is ‘outside’, what is ‘objective’ is that which I do not master. This characteristic not only turns everything I can control into something ‘subjective’ but also threatens the absolute determination of ‘objectivity’ which becomes relative to *my* mastery. This, however, need not be so if there were things which I never could control, which in principle would remain outside the horizon of my mastery. And so we keep digging deeper and deeper, keep looking further and further, and fascinated by the new, ‘objective’ discoveries, soon realise that they are as relative to us as were the old ones which we left behind. Hunting for a shadow, we find pieces of rocks and, dissatisfied with our constructions of stone, keep looking, chasting the wind...

Mastery and control do not seem to be the definite features distinguishing subjective from objective. Certainly, the glass in front of me, which I can manipulate as I wish, is there *objectively*. Why? Because it is *external*, it ‘exists independently from me’, I may leave, disappear, die – the glass will still be there (unless something destroys it). But this ‘independent existence’ is but a new variation on the theme of mastery and non-mastery, in any case, of relativity. As a privative of “dependence”, it simply means that I do not have full control over this existence, that it keeps something away from me.<sup>178</sup> What this something is, nobody could ever tell... And so we return to the relative character of ‘objectivity’, relative to the ‘subject’ from which it must be independent.

The ambiguity can be formulated as follows. The pure *subjectivity* is the pure *immediacy*, the coincidence of the *sign* and signified, of action and reaction. Everything which slips out of this ideally narrow circle by carrying an element of *non-actuality*, acquires a degree of objectivity, though not necessarily *objectivity* as mere *externality* confined to the *horizon of actuality*. The problem is that *non-actuality*, where something ‘objective’ and not relative to mere *here-and-now* was expected, brings in something into the *actually given*, something which seems uncanny subjective. Whatever I bring into the *actual* situation is of a ‘subjective’ character; another person might bring in other preconceptions and distinctions. As Bergson used to observe, the apparent indeterminacy of one’s actions and reactions derives from one’s memory, from this *non-actual* element which one’s ‘subjectivity’ contributes to the *actual* situation. Thus ‘objectivity’, having made a leap towards the most universal and *non-actual* laws, tends back towards more and more *actually given*. These two extremes – whether as ‘form’ and ‘matter’, or as ‘universal laws’ and ‘actual data’, as ‘theories’ and ‘observations’ – delimit the understanding of ‘objectivity’. Unfortunately, both extremes can be equally well characterised as ‘subjective’: the *non-actuality* which is accumulated only in the ‘mind’ of a ‘subject’, and the pure *immediacy* which is not only ‘theory dependent’ but also relative to *here-and-now*, that is, presence of a ‘subject’.

Instead of analyzing the possible and impossible variations of this ambiguity, we only give a few examples which relate directly to the deflation of *self* or, as the case may be, inflation of ‘subject’.

### *Inside vs. outside*

Insisting on *my* in *my self* amounts to a projection of the visible categories and introduces an antinomous dialectics of pseudo-opposites, of ‘within’ and ‘without’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’,

131.

<sup>177</sup>B. Pascal, *Pensées*. VII:434

133.

<sup>178</sup>Latin “*dependeo*” means to hang on, from or down, with variations such as to ‘be derived from’ or ‘be governed by’.

'subjective' and 'objective'. A prophet speaking from 'within', may be accused of projecting extreme 'subjectivity' onto the 'objective' world. Yet, he does not speak *his* words but only words which were revealed to him, which were manifested 'inside'. Prophets relate only what has been revealed – 'inside', but *from* 'outside'; they only "repeat words they have heard in secret amidst the silence."<sup>179</sup> It is not our objective to design psychological theories of possible factors conditioning such experiences and classifying them as 'illusions'.<sup>180</sup> They may be right and may be wrong but never touch the quality and meaning of the experience. And in the experience, on the one hand, it is one's *self*, something very intimate 'within', which orders one to speak, to act in this rather than that way, which is the source of the experience and its *commanding* character. On the other hand, one's *self* is not *oneself*, it does not obey one's *will*, and so the origin lies 'outside'. It is both 'inside' and 'outside'. "We wonder whence it came: from the outside, or from the inside? Once it disappears, we say, "It was inside – and yet, no, it wasn't inside." We must not try to learn whence it comes, for here there is no 'whence'."<sup>181</sup>

The 'inside'-‘outside’, like other spatial analogies may to some extent apply to the level of egotic drives and their *objects*, perhaps also to the level of *mineness* confronted with the vast world which is *not-mine*, but never to the level of *invisibles*. Put other way, any appearance of (not to mention dependence on) such categories signals a discourse of a lower level, even if it attempts and pretends to address a higher one.

#### 134. *Objective values vs. subjective preferences*

The ambiguity between *objectivity* of *external objects* and more vague, but also more common, *objectivity* of *independence*, illustrated by the following example, is quite a common ground of confusion and misunderstandings.

Max Scheler claimed the existence of an objective hierarchy of values which, of course, appeared most repulsive to all forms of empiricism identifying values with *subjective* inclinations and mere *acts* of preferences. "Of course that things do not have any value in-themselves, there are no values independently from our (or other) being for which objective things may or may not have some value." The conflict, if there is any, rests exclusively on the understanding of the words "objective", "subjective", eventually, of "T".

For the empirically minded opponents of the objective values the 'subjective I' is an atom, an unstructured (even if, possibly, complicated) entity which determines the pole of subjectivity. Everything which is in one or another (but always unclearly specified) way ascribed to this ego as somehow originating in it, is subjective. Sensations, perceptions, impressions and feelings are as subjective as thoughts, ideas, intuitions, revelations – they are all *mine*. Going only a bit further, the 'objective' is something which not only is completely independent from and not relative to *me*, but which is so also in relation to all humans, perhaps even, to all other beings. Strangely enough, as the examples of 'objective' beings, one manages to mention only pieces of chalk, chairs, tables. The rejection of objectivity of values rests on the conflation of one's whole, structured being with an ideal noumenal unity of a *complex ego*, and claiming that everything relative in whatsoever way to this being is equally 'subjective'. Equivalently (for this is only another expression of the same conflation), the rejection rests on pointing at tables and chairs, and making the trivial observation that values are not things of the same kind.

Values are not *objects* and yet they are found residing objectively *above* every particular existence. The following analogy may help clarifying the issue. We consider thoughts to be our possessions, *my* thoughts to be *mine*, in the sense that others do not have access to them unless *I*, their originator and possessor, reveal them. Their subjectivity consists also in that once formulated and conscious, they can be to some extend manipulated and controlled by *me*. However, it is

---

<sup>179</sup>S. Weil, *Waiting for God*. Letter IV.Spiritual Autobiography:p.35 Absence of any visible sources and reasons of the visions and spoken words, combined with their eventual truth, might serve as at least partial justification for viewing prophecy as "an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man's rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty; [...] the highest degree and greatest perfection man can attain" [M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*. II:36]. But of course, one can also wait for a more mundane explanation which, however, is still, as it always has been, to be waited for.

<sup>180</sup>True, sometimes, they may be illusions. The whole art is to learn to distinguish those which are from those which are not, and we are far from pretending that we have any clear-cut criteria for doing that. "Divining in advance whether our dark partner symbolises a shortcoming that we should overcome or a meaningful bit of life that we should accept – this is one of the most difficult problems that we encounter on the way to individuation." [M.-L. von Franz, *The Process of Individuation*. p.184]

<sup>181</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.8

only control of limited degree because thoughts (unlike phantasies) have content and presentation which is not completely underlined *my will*. Moreover, except for some very special cases, *I* do not generate *my thoughts*. *I* encounter them, often when *I* think about completely other things, often when *I* do not think at all (changing the focus of attention after a prolonged concentration on a problem provokes often spontaneous emergence of most creative solutions). One will delegate the responsibility for the appearance of thoughts to the ‘brain’, to one’s own brain, which is supposed to work beyond the threshold of one’s consciousness. But such a delegation of responsibility can at best serve as a partial (pseudo-)explanation in terms of the currently accepted imagery – it does not in any way contribute to rendering comprehensible the meaning of such a ‘foreign element’ in the midst of one’s most intimate privacy. Even if *I* possess *my thoughts*, *I* am not their originator or, even if *I* am, it is not *myself* in the same sense of the subjective, *actually conscious ego*. “Subjectivism is mistakenly connected with *apriorism* only when *apriori* is taken not only as (exclusively) primary «law» of acts, but also as the law of acts of an «*I*» or a «*subject*».”<sup>182</sup> The objectivity of the hierarchy of values can be understood plausibly along the same lines as the fact that *I* do not create values, *I* do not determine that ‘good’ is better than ‘bad’, that ‘holy’ is higher than ‘pleasant’ – *I* encounter it as an objective fact.<sup>183</sup> The objectivity of values reflects the stratification of being in which the *active subject* encounters not only *external* things but also ones which, affecting his motives, goals and acts, do not originate in his activity and are not reducible to its results.

### *Self vs. ego*

135.

The ambiguity just sketched becomes very prominent in the refutations of the ultimate truth of the dictum “Man is the measure of all things.” Most trivially one would interpret it as stating that *subjective* goals, wishes and whims, feelings and perceptions measure the true being of all things and refute it as a sophism – at best immediately, and at worst, using half of a lengthy dialogue. A bit more psychologically, one might observe that indeed one’s moods and general situation will influence the way things are experienced and handled. One would still try to maintain some opposition to the hard and precisely *objective* truths about things, though this becomes a bit more problematic. Finally, one can take “man” to mean not the *actual* or psychological subject but the *self* of existential confrontation. “Measure” loses then most of its normative and moral character and becomes a mere reflection of the relativity of beings to *existential distinctions*.

Historically, most forms of (the attempts at or claims to) *actually* controlling the higher, spiritual dimension – whether ancient forms of magic, theurgy, this “power higher than all human wisdom, embracing the blessings of divination, the purifying powers of initiation, and in a word all the operations of divine possession,”<sup>184</sup> ambitions of Pico and then pretensions of a Renaissance magus personified eventually as doctor Faustus, esoteric practices of the Mdm. Blavatsky circle, Rudolf Steiner’s guidelines for systematic development of genuine spirituality or, finally, the so called “New Age religiosity” (which is not newer phenomenon than modernity and romanticism) – all such forms result from the conflation of *self*, which truly is the source, with the *actual* ego for which this deeply *spiritual* truth turns into a trivially flat falsehood. It leads to the flattening of *existence*, to considering it only along the *horizontal dimension of visibility*, for everything else and, in particular, “the nature [«Wesen»] which man opposes to himself in religion and theology as something different from himself, is really only his own nature.”<sup>185</sup>

The Hindu thinkers avoided confusion of the *atman* with the empirical self, the *jivatman*, just like German idealists avoided confusion of the transcendental with the empirical ego. Kierkegaard accused of this confusion the Romanticist followers of Fichte: “This Fichtean principle, that subjec-

<sup>182</sup> M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics.... II:A.* «Subjektivismus ist mit dem Apriorismus aber auch dann irrig verkettet, wenn das Apriori nich nur als (ausschließliches) primäres ‘Gesetz’ von Akten, sondern außerdem noch als das Gesetz von Akten eines ‘Ich’ oder eines ‘Subjektes’ gedeutet wird.» The point is much subtler than we are making it here. Scheler objects to any kind of «*subject*», whether empirical or transcendental, as some posited content while, as he maintains, *a priori* can concern only acts as such: their structure, intentions, values they express. But our only concern is the fact that the *actual* intentions and acts carry *aspects* which are neither determined nor controlled by *ego*. Whether these are *a priori* or not (and where one at all wishes to draw the line of this opposition) is another issue.

<sup>183</sup> If somebody does not, and claims that, for instance, ‘pleasant’ is a higher value than ‘holy’ then he can be easily accused of some blindness to values or illusion in their perception. But even if we do not do that, and if his statements are not based on merely arbitrary choices, then he, too, encounters ‘pleasant’ as higher than ‘holy’, he *finds them being so* and does not merely decide them to be so.

<sup>184</sup> Proclus, *Platonic Theology*. [after E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*. p.291]

<sup>185</sup> L. Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Nature of Religion*. III

tivity, that Self has constitutive validity and is the only omnipotent, has been taken up by Schlegel and Tieck, and applied to the world. This caused double difficulty. For the first, one confused the empirical and finite Self with the eternal Self; for the second, one confused the metaphysical reality with the historical one.”<sup>186</sup> The same confusion affected then Kierkegaard’s religious individual confronting God; the individual which, in the hands of French existentialists, became a lonely ego laden with the impossibility to constitute any genuine meanings from ‘within’ its alienated subjectivity.<sup>187</sup> The prevalence of this confusion suggests the simple reflection: removing the *absolute* which constitutes the ultimate dimension of *existence*, one is removing also the ground for this very distinction, for now *existence* can only be understood as *ego*, as unfolding on one level only, in the sphere of *visibility*.

136. **Civilisation vs. nature**

A similar ambiguity concerning the meaning of subjectivity can be discerned in the understanding of civilisation as opposed to nature. One says that civilisation, history, society are creations of mankind and, imperceptibly, tends to find in it a reason to pride. Since they are created by ‘us’, they carry this character of ‘subjectivity’, of being relative to ‘us’, being ‘our’ products, ‘our’ achievements. Nature, on the other hand, remains ‘out there’, retaining the character of ‘given objectivity’. Such oppositions may perhaps have some relevance in sociological, historical or ecological studies. But from the point of view of individual *existence*, this collective ‘subject’ is but a *posited* ideality, like a noumenal self endowed with features and functions of the *ego*. In fact, it has nothing to do with any *subject*, not to mention *self*. In *my experience* the role of history, civilisation, and ‘us’ who created them, may be very close, if not entirely analogous, to that played by nature – they are encountered, they are ‘objective’, ‘outside’ *myself*. *Positing* such a collective ‘subject’ may have close associations with the “idolatry of history [which] is born of this unavowed nostalgia for a future which would justify the unjustifiable.”<sup>188</sup> The fact that historical creations are ‘ours’ does not necessarily make them more human than nature. Inhumanity of some such creations is no better, and often worse, than inhumanity of the most disastrous natural calamities.

This is not the place for yet another critique of historicism. We only want to observe that the attitudes, reactions and activities required or only made possible by society can be very similar to those posed by nature. It helps very little that a political system was created by ‘us’ if to change it requires sacrifice, courage, dedication and analyses surpassing those required in confrontation with the non-human world. The human world, the world created by ‘us’, is not underlined our control any more than nature. “Man is no longer able to control the world, which emerged thanks to him; this world overwhelms man, liberates itself from him, appears to him as independent and man no longer possess the word-spell with which he could placate Golem which he created.”<sup>189</sup> That it is ‘we’ who create history and society is as true as it is illusory. “Whether primitive or not, mankind always stands on the brink of actions it performs itself but does not control. The whole world wants peace and the whole world prepares for war, to take but one example. Mankind is powerless against mankind, and the gods, as ever, show it the ways of fate. Today we call the gods “factors”, which comes from *facere*, ‘to make’. The makers stand behind the wings of the world-theatre.”<sup>190</sup> We ‘create’ our society and history just like ants create the ant-heap and its history. Sure, without ants, no ant-heaps. But we conflate the necessary conditions with the sufficient ones only because craving a final explanation and control, we are willing to settle for a mere pretense of either. For an individual ant the heap is as much nature as it is a society, it is encountered with the same character of givenness as the nature around, even if this ant contributed far over the average to building the heap (that is, to strengthening of the society or to preservation of nature?) The collective ‘subjects’ are of entirely different nature than the individual ones, to the degree that

<sup>186</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*. II:4.Irony after Fichte

<sup>187</sup>The accusation of this confusion must not be confused with the claim of ontological independence of the two egos. Such a claim might, occasionally, seem present, for instance, in the opposition postulated by Husserl’s between pure and empirical ego. Ingarden clarifies: “The subject of the stream of consciousness is not a separate entity in relation to the soul [empirical ego] which unfolds in the experiences of this stream, but is inherent in it as the axis of its construction/Stream of experience, subject, soul, respectively human person, are only certain «aspects» of one, internally compact, conscious being: a monad.” [R. Ingarden, *The Controversy about World’s Existence*. vol.II:XVII.V.79/83] One would be tempted to recall again formal distinction of Duns Scotus, according to which, these two (as well as other) levels of *existence* are both real and yet not really separable.

<sup>188</sup>R. Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*. II:The control of history;p.192

<sup>189</sup>M. Buber, *The Problem of Man*. II:1.1

<sup>190</sup>C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. I:49

talking about subjects seems misleading. The illusion that ‘we’ create history and society in a way which is somewhat analogous to the way an individual unfolds his life, comes from confusing an ideal ‘us’ with an individual ‘subject’. The illusion that ‘we’ not only create but also *actually* control our history and society comes then from considering such a ‘subject’ as not living on the border between *visible* and *invisible* but as being in full control of itself. The socio-historical optimism is but another face of humanism turned positivism, of an inflation of ego which has been endowed with the power of voluntarily moulding its own (that is, ‘our’ own) world. Of course, we have to leave analysing any further distinctions of this kind and their consequences to sociologists, economists and political scientists.

## 2 Above and below

In Book I we saw the relation of *ontological founding* of lower levels by the higher ones, the stages of hypostases, the gradual *actualisation* of the *original virtuality*. This Book has, so far, described the *reflection* over and of these levels in the *reflective experience* which begins and proceeds with the categories of *actuality*, but which is grounded in the ontological hierarchy. Our being is structured into different levels according to the temporal scope and forms of *transcendence*, and this structure reflects the ontological hierarchy of regions of Being, the generative order of hypostases. The hierarchy is experienced through different kinds of *signs* and ways these *signs* are juxtaposed in any *concrete experience*.

The *distinctions* between the levels, grounded in experience as they might be, are *distinctions of reflection*, that is, are prone to giving rise to *reflective dissociation*. *Reflection* tends to re-cognise the *distinctions*, if not the hierarchy, of levels and it often builds its models around particular level. Various *complexes*, *concepts* and ideas acquire vastly different character when viewed by *reflection* from a limited perspective of a single level. However, any experience involves all the levels of Being – the *one* as its ultimate, *transcendent* and *invisible* yet always present source, the unity of *life* and the *world* as the horizon of the *visible distinctions*, the *complexes* of *actual situations* and involved *recognitions* and, possibly, the *immediate objects*. In phenomenological terms, every *immediate perception* is involved in the texture of *actual mood* or *impression*, surrounded by the feeling of *my life* and, ultimately (that is also, trans-phenomenally), by the *invisible inspiration*.

This section summarises schematically the distinctions between various levels and the ways in which they are related to each other. This should clarify not only the differences which offer *reflection* the possibility of considering *experience* from different perspectives but also the unity of an *experience* which, indeed, gathers all the levels into one whole.<sup>191</sup> The proper *unity* of *existence* will be treated in Book III.

### 2.1 The hierarchy of levels

First of all, the notion of time itself acquires quite different determinations depending on the level of *reflection*. In terms of *actuality*, it is the primary factor distinguishing the levels. The further down we move in the hierarchy, the more we approach ideal *immediacy*. In terms of objective time, it means simply shorter time. But objective time offers only an analogy of limited value. It would require to say that the level of *invisibles* corresponds to infinity of time, which is a rather poor picture. The further down we move, the more we approach the actual experience of *objective time*, while the further up, the closer we are to the *origin* of time. The level of *invisibles* lies *above* time in the sense that its *distinctions* are not prone to objectification and hence are not involved into the temporality which is but an *aspect of objectivity*. It is the level involving only essentially *non-actual distinctions*, that is, *distinctions* whose value and structure is not affected by the temporality of experience. As lying *above* time, they may be termed eternal, while the lower levels, with their inherent temporality are only “moving image of eternity.”<sup>192</sup>

<sup>191</sup> Parts of the following subsection, in particular §141-§142, are due to Max Scheler, in particular, M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics...*, M. Scheler, *Anthropological Writings*. The main difference consists in that Scheler is concerned almost exclusively with the hierarchy of ethical values. Yet, except for the aspect of temporality and transcendence, the characterisation of the differences between various levels, as well as the levels themselves, are very similar. Another difference, appearing in 2.2.1, the entire §145, concerns the relation between different levels which here, unlike with Scheler, is not just that of *founding*.

<sup>192</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*. VII

Trying to understand the world in terms of pure *immediacy* alone, positing the pure *here-and-now* as the only reality, would imply that there is no time but only a point-like pure ‘now’. Perceiving the world in *objective* terms of *complexes* and their relations yields the objective time, succession of ideally *dissociated* time-points. Perceiving it in terms of *mineness* or, more generally, in terms of a unity of a living being, yields the ‘time of life’ and, in fact, the ‘lived time’. Bergson’s *durée* is an excellent and most thoroughly worked out example of this perspective. Less inspiring examples are provided by some phenomenologically grounded existentialistic theories of time as unity of past, now and future centered around the ecstatic actuality of lived experience. Finally, reflection focused exclusively on the level of *invisibles* leads to denying the reality of time. Unlike in the first case, however, it does not posit the exclusive reality of pure *immediacy* but, instead, some form of supra-temporal eternity, of which *here-and-now* is but a manifestation.

We can summarise this trace of temporality schematically as follows:

	<i>experienced</i> – objectified time
<b>4.</b> :	above time – infinite
<b>3.</b> :	time of <i>my life</i> – finite and unlimited
<b>2.</b> :	time of things – finite and limited
<b>1.</b> :	‘shortest experienced time’ – ideal now

138. Modifications of temporality are reflected in the character of the ‘objective’ contents of the experiences of the respective level.

	<i>in experience</i> – <i>in abstracto</i> /objectified
<b>4.</b> :	origin – the one
<b>3.</b> :	<i>the world</i> – universe
<b>2.</b> :	situation – complex
<b>1.</b> :	the sign itself – object

This ‘objective’ trace is thought in dissociation from the temporal dimension. It has a spatial character of simultaneity or *actual* co-presence. Even when we think ‘the world’ with its history and development, we still tend to *posit* it as an *actual* totality. Just as ‘objectivity’ carries this spatial character, so the temporal dimension dominates the modifications of the *experiences* of the ‘subjective’ aspect.

	<i>in experience</i> – <i>in abstracto</i> /objectified
<b>4.</b> :	<i>my self</i> – self, sacrum
<b>3.</b> :	<i>my life</i> – myself
<b>2.</b> :	body – ego
<b>1.</b> :	organ – ideal subject

Of course, the *dissociation* of *spatiality* from *temporality* is only an ideal abstraction. Yet, space, in its ‘frozen’ simultaneity, functions as the limit of temporality, as permanence. But even though we tend to refer the vague intuition of eternity to the permanence as some ideal limit of atemporal ‘objectivity’, it is only in the *actual* passage of time that we *concretely experience* permanence. The sense of permanence is only another side of the sense of change and passage of time and it is naturally acquired and recognised in the experience of getting old. *Mundus senescit*, “The world has aged”, is not any experience of childhood. That the world, *this world* ages – and aging, withers – is only a reflection of the fact that so does its *experience*. This frequent, and often only apparent, withering of the intensity of the *experience*, which one tends to ascribe to old people, is but a modification of the level from which old people *experience* their life. Old age simply experiences time (and the world) differently than the young one. The approaching death, the knowledge that most things one was to experience have already happened, make one think of one’s life as a whole, if not quite completed, than in any case as not consisting merely of petty *actualities*. The significant time span is no longer a mere moment, a brief actuality but years, perhaps, decades. The details wither but they give place to a new quality of *experience*, which with time becomes itself *an experience* and which younger people will simply find irrelevant, if they find it at all.<sup>193</sup>

Above all, all the changes of the surrounding world notwithstanding, one sees that nothing has really changed, that something fundamental, even if ingraspable, remained the same since

<sup>193</sup>We are not concerned with the tasteless caricatures trying to the last moment pretend that they are experiencing the world with youthful intensity. *Attachment* and despair will be addressed in Book III.

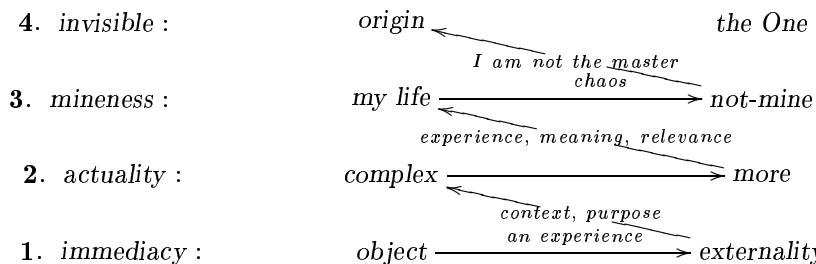
the earliest days of one's childhood. One may recognise the same curiosity or indifference, the same feelings of wonder or disenchantment, the same vague motivations and fascinations. The difference is only that one has already seen all that before, that one knows that some things need time and thus single moments, enchanting and gratifying as they may be, are no longer of the highest importance. Shall we also mention the quite so frequent turn towards various forms of religiosity? It is not, however, as one often wants to interpret it, a mere fear of facing the death, or else a mere disillusionment and dissatisfaction with one's life (possible as these are). On the contrary, it is rather the sign of reaching the level of experience at which one realises the limits of one's life and world, perhaps, their insufficiency, if not vanity. The 'objectified' permanence gives place to the sense of *eternity*, not any infinity of time, but a lived *eternity*, the constant presence of *invisibles*, perhaps even of the ultimate *nothingness*, which has been strangely known all one's life. It is neither necessary to get old to meet such experiences, nor does getting old necessarily imply that one will meet them. But you have seen such a transition in old people more than once and more often than in the young ones.

The tension between the objective and subjective aspect enters the *horizon of actuality* through 139. various *signs*. Their character varies depending on the level which they address, to which they point, from which their contents arise.

original – reflective
4. : commands, inspirations – that <i>I am not the master</i> : symbols
3. : qualities of life, 'soulful' feelings – that <i>I am</i> : general thoughts
2. : moods, impressions, vital feelings – that <i>it is so-and-so</i> : concepts
1. : sensations, instantaneous images – that <i>it is</i> : substances, objects

At the lowest level the *signs* coincide with the *immediate object* and give rise to merely reactive response relative to a particular organ, a point of the body, a nervous nexus. The higher we move in the hierarchy, not only the response becomes less reactive but also the more *clear* becomes the *distance* separating the *sign* from the signified or, the *actual* from the non-*actual* and, eventually, from the *non-actual*. *Experience* of this *distance* is but a reflection of the form of *transcendence* which is an aspect equally constitutive for each level as temporality.

Transcendence is the presence of *non-actuality*. At each level below the *invisibles* it has two 140. aspects: the *vertical*, relating directly to the higher level, and *horizontal* which is a reflection of the *vertical* aspect in terms and categories of the given level. For instance, the *more* at the level of *actuality* is but a quantitative 'more' of *complexes* of which *reflection* 'knows', even if only implicitly or potentially. But this *more* is only a reflection of the horizon of the *world* and *my life*, which are as if projected into the context which tries to understand everything as *complexes*. The *more*, rendered as the flux of experience, throws *reflection* back onto itself and establishes meaning of *complexes* in relation to one's life. Similarly, the *horizontal aspect* at the level of *mineness* comprises that which is *not-mine*. This, however, is still a determination in terms of *mineness* and it merely reflects the *vertical transcendence*, the presence of *invisibles*.<sup>194</sup> Schematically:



The *horizontal aspect* has always a negative character: it is that which is not ... *here-and-now*, *actual*, *mine*. Using it is a criterion of progress might easily lead into a Hegelian kind of dialec-

<sup>194</sup>The vertical aspects of transcendence could be described as what Paul Tillich called "forms of meaning". If one includes in this term "1. all particularities of individual meanings and 2. of all separate connections of meaning and even 3. the universal connection of meaning, then in relation to the universal connection of meaning 4. the unconditioned meaning may be designated as the import of meaning." [P. Tillich, *What is religion?*? I:1.1.a [my numbering]] And the "import of meaning is the ground of reality presupposed in all forms of meaning, upon whose constant presence the ultimate meaningfulness, the significance, and the essentiality of every act of meaning rest." [Ibid. I:Introduction.c.ii].

tics. But this negative, *horizontal aspect* reflects only the *vertical aspect* which is known and experienced not as a mere lack, limit and negation but positively. It penetrates the quality of the experiences at the given level, placing them on the *traces* which reach to the deeper, that is higher, sources. It is this higher level, the level less dominated by the *actuality*, which is the source of the mode of *transcendence experienced* at the lower level. The *horizontal aspect* reflects the *vertical aspect* in the multiplicity differentiated according to the categories of the lower level. It refers thus always to the higher, *founding element* – but only indirectly. Its negative – or quantitative – character signifies, in terms of reflective development, encountering a limit – a limit beyond which the categories applied so far seem to lose their meaning, beyond which there is nothing left except, perhaps, a routine repetition stiffening the soul; a limit showing worthlessness of the things and categories which so far have been experienced as the ultimate. Encounter with the *vertical aspect*, on the other hand, is *an experience* of something fundamentally new, something which, at first, appears only as a vague promise, but which with time discloses a deeper meaning, a new way of seeing also earlier experiences. This encounter is a true *anamnesis*, a *re-cognition* of something which has been known for a long time, but only dimly and indistinctly, as a vague intuition, an indefinable *rest*.

141. As we move higher in the hierarchy of levels, we leave *actual* determinations. We lose *objective* categories, the *distinctions* become less rigid and *precise* and do not present us with any definite *objects* – they become *vague*. But by the same token, they become more intimate, they penetrate deeper into our being. The intensity of *signs* increases and so does the depth of satisfaction found in experiences – they become *clearer*. A momentaneous elation, a simple joy over some particular event which passes in an instant may be as natural and authentic as superficial. It does not last, it does not reach the depth of person, it is contextual and localised. A peace of soul, a joy of life, humility of sainthood are experienced without any such localisation, independently even from the context where they may happen to become *manifest*. Entering the *horizon of actuality*, their *signs* give a deep, spiritual satisfaction which is as *clear* as it is undefinable.

Vagueness means also that the *clarity* of the *signs* is merely indicative, alluding, as if inviting, rather than forcefully demanding, imposing its *objective* presence. It is calm and spreads calmness. As Plotinus says it: “The Good is gentle and friendly and tender, and we have it present when we but will.”<sup>195</sup> Vagueness of the *signs* and experience of the higher levels is just another side of the lack of definite *objective* correlates. And this means that they are less relative, they are less restricted to particular regions of Being, are able to embrace more varied experiences. Eventually, the *invisibles* are *absolute* – free from any limits of *objectivity*, not relative to any particular region of Being.

The lack of *objective* determinations, in turn, means that the higher levels of experience are more constant and may remain unchanged through the variations of lower levels. A particular *mood* can allow a variety of sensations which do not change the *mood*. A *quality of life* will remain the same irrespectively of the variation of particular *moods* and *impressions*. Conformance to the *absolute command* will remain unaffected by any variation in particular *moods*, *thoughts* and may incarnate into very different *qualities of life*. And even a failure in conformance leaves the validity of the *command* unaffected.

142. The higher we move in the hierarchy of levels, the further are the *signs* removed from the signified. At the level of *immediacy* the two coincide, while *invisibles* never coincide with the *signs* which manifest them, remaining essentially *transcendent*, that is, being experienced *always and only* as *non-actual* pure *commands*.<sup>196</sup>

This is an aspect of non-reactivity of higher experiences. Sensations are pure reactions, the *sign*, coinciding with the presence of the signified, is simply the elicited reaction. *Moods* are already affected by the presence of *non-actuality* which defers the possible reaction and renders it partially indeterminate. Yet, although what an *impression* announces may still hide behind it, the *impression* itself is ‘given’, it is reactive. The *qualities of life* are passive but are not reactions to any specific situations. They announce something which can be only accepted, though what the acceptance means in practice is far removed from the *quality* itself. *Commands* and *inspirations*

---

<sup>195</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.12

<sup>196</sup> A phenomenological analogy could be to say that the *signs* at the higher levels have more intentional character, they are more *clearly* directed ‘toward something’ than are the *signs* at the lower levels. Yet, this ‘something’ becomes at the same time less and less identifiable and escapes completely phenomenological reductions.

have no reactive element at all, being completely independent from any particular beings and regions of Being.

The non-reactive character of *signs* is proportional to (can be “measured” by) the extent to which they are influenced by our attention and will. The significance of the lowest *signs* can be too high extend determined by the will. One can lessen the feeling of pain, virtually removing its relevance, by an effort of will to overcome it, for instance, by turning away one’s attention and concentrating on something else. And, of course, one can easily produce painful experiences, just like one can arrange circumstances so as to produce pleasant effects for sight, touch or taste. To some extent, one can also arrange the circumstances so that they will produce agreeable or repulsive *impressions*; one can have some knowledge about kinds of circumstances which result in particular *moods*. But the higher we move in the hierarchy of levels, the less power one has over the presence or absence of the respective *signs*, not to mention their signified correlates. One can try to lead one’s life so as to give it a specific *quality*, but this *quality* is never entirely under our control. One can crave happiness without ever achieving it, while the regrettable *qualities* of one’s life can be impossible for one to change. (One can, of course, always do something, but the eventual effects of one’s *acts* and *actions* are not determined by one’s intentions.) With respect to the deepest aspects of being like holiness, despair, *love*, one’s will has nothing to say. They are *gifts* which one can neither refuse nor provoke, one can neither cause their *presence* nor make them disappear. At most, one can try to ignore them which is simply pretending that they are not there – apparently without any immediate consequences but, in the long run, affecting one in the deepest way. On the other hand, their *manifestations*, which do not depend on one’s will either, require a kind of attention, say, *openness*, which is not any focusing of the will, but merely a humble cooperation with the hidden, primordial causes. We should emphasize here the difference between the presence of *invisibles*, and their *manifestations* in *actual signs*. Their presence, the ontological fact, is independent of our attention and cooperation. But the experienced form of this *presence*, the character of their *manifestations*, is conditioned by *openness* and spiritual directness.<sup>197</sup>

## 2.2 As above, so below

We have divided experience into levels and talked as if our life was composed of them being but a ... complex, a *totality*? But every life is an unrepeatable *unity* which is not constituted by various parts and elements. All such parts and elements are but manifestations, but *actual* expressions of deeper aspects and, eventually, of the *unity*. Every *immanent* unity is founded in the *transcendence*, every *actuality* draws its vital juices from the *non-actual* roots. The concrete *unity* of existence will be discussed in Book III. Now, we will review only the more formal aspects of this *unity*, namely, the co-presence of all levels and, in particular, the presence of *invisibles* in *actual* experiences.

### 2.2.1. Presence and co-presence

It is common to distinguish various aspects of an act like, for instance, the intentional correlate, the pragmatic aspect, the ethical one. In §79, p. 143, we have identified the *rest* surrounding every act and carrying the *present aspects* which do not become thematically *actualised*. The *immediate* correlate of an *act* is its *object*. But being involved into the context of some *action*, the *act* has always also some goal, it has a pragmatic aspect. Whether the goal is immediate or remote does not change its character as the *actual* objective intended by the *act*. We have then, §71, distinguished between the objectives, the *objective* goals and the motivations anchored no longer in mere *actions* but in *activities* and expressing the lived, and sometimes also declared values. This level is much broader and comprises much more than merely ethical issues but, being the level of *mineness*, and hence of the relation to *not-mine*, it certainly embraces also the ethical elements. Finally, announcing the *presence* of the *invisible*, the *act* is surrounded by the *rest* described in

<sup>197</sup>The spiritual and mystical writings abound in variations over the theme of inner concentration, focused attention, presence of mind in the face of spiritual life. “*Recueillement*” is a technical term of spirituality denoting the action or fact of concentrating one’s thought on spiritual life in detachment from worldly preoccupations. In so far as it refers to *acts* or *facts*, it can be concerned only with *manifestations*. Much of ‘spirituality’, especially its degenerate and more hysterical versions, have never managed to reach beyond the realm of *actual signs*. Book III considers the *spiritual dimension of existence* in more detail.

1.4.1. Thus, every *immediacy*, at least *immediacy* of an *act*, expresses all the levels, and thus carries their *unity* in its structure.

144. The higher levels of *experience* remain more constant and allow a large variation at the lower levels. The increased constancy (in the upward movement) is an experiential counterpart of the co-presence of all levels.

If I am in a good *mood*, I may accept a lot of small, insignificant annoyances which do not bring me out of this *mood*. In fact, the *mood* I am in will influence the way I handle these small situations, it will remain *present* in all these *actual* situations. Similarly, a person may remain generally dissatisfied with his life through all his particular experiences; no positive event seems to be able to change this general *quality* of his life. And again, this *quality* makes itself felt and efficient, *present*, in various ways in all concrete situations. Perhaps, by finding negative aspects in any, even most positive experiences, perhaps, by awaiting always the inevitable end of such experiences, that is, awaiting always for a bitter and unwelcome continuation. It would be too strong to say that this *quality* determines the character of all concrete experiences. But it casts its shadow over them, it moulds them in a specific way so that they seem to conform to the general scheme of things which becomes *present* in all *actual* experiences.

One should be careful with the criterion of constancy when applied to the highest level. Indeed, the *quality of life* of St. Francis, his amiability and goodness seem to have accompanied him from the very childhood all his life, while with respect to his sainthood, the dream on the way to the Fourth Crusade marks a break and begins a new chapter. St. Paul, before and after the vision on the way to Damascus, was the same person and many *qualities* (zeal, dedication, *je ne sais quoi*) where present in his life before as much as after the conversion. The constancy of *invisibles* is different from the possible constancy (and transience) of their *manifestations*. It is not relative to one's life but consists in transcending the temporal dimension and the categories of *mineness*. There is nothing like '*my* sainthood' or '*your* sainthood', and sainthood remains sainthood whether it is *manifested* or not, or whether it is *manifested* in one person or in another. And yet, the *invisibles* are present in *any experience* as its deepest aspects, the *invisible* personal traits, the source which does not create the specific details of *actual* situation but merely lends it an aura and puts a personal signature underneath. *Manifestations* are only particularly intense and *visible signs* of this presence.

145. Now, higher levels do not create the specific contents of the lower ones nor vice versa. Each level, determined by its specific tension between *actuality* and *non-actuality*, has its own characteristic contents and ways of their presentation. The *invisibles* do not determine one's life. The *quality* of one's life does not determine the *actual* situations one gets involved in. The *actual moods* and *impressions* do not determine any particular sensations. In fact, the full range of lower phenomena can be experienced along with any configuration of the higher aspects. In short, the higher aspects of *experience* do not *found* the contents of the lower ones, in the technical sense of phenomenological founding (i.e., as necessary conditions).

But the higher aspects influence crucially the lower ones, they sink in and penetrate whatever qualities may emerge at the lower levels. An annoyance is an annoyance but it changes its character when encountered in a good or in a bad *mood*. A joy or sadness of a pessimist is different from the respective feelings of an optimist. The drive and energy of life of a saint are different from the similar *qualities* in the life of a person nourished by negation, hatred or bitterness. A joyful feeling of a person who is generally dissatisfied with life will still be joyful. Yet, this joy will be limited to the level of *actuality*. It will be, so to speak, 'blocked' if it 'tries' to penetrate deeper into the personal being; 'blocked' by a remainder of its transience, by painful memories, or simply 'blocked' by the general dissatisfaction with life. In other words, it won't be able to spread over the totality of personal being, but will remain localised. You might have heard the difference between a short, nervous, almost involuntary laughter which seems to be disturbed by the immediate bad conscience, as if there was no *real* reason to laugh and one did it only because one could not resist it, and, on the other hand, a cordial, warm, full-blooded laughter which seems to flow from the very bottom of the heart, in which the laughing face is but an expression of the soul which embraces the whole world with its hearty laughter. In the former case, the *actual* level is not in conformance with the higher level of one's being and the inability for a hearty laughter modifies the *actual* one. It is still laughter, over the same funny thing, but it testifies to another personal involvement than the latter.

This interplay and penetration of lower levels by the higher ones in *an actual experience* reminds a bit of the ‘founding’ relation. But it is not founding because the *actuality* of a given lower aspect, of laughter or joy, is not conditioned by the presence of any particular higher aspect – the former is only modified by the latter. This modification, this *rest* and *aura* which higher aspects extend to the lower ones, witness to the unity of an experience involving the aspects of all levels. This is the form of presence of higher, eventually *invisible*, aspects in all experience.

An *immediate experience*, an act of *reflection* is obviously involved in a context of an *actual* situation. As phenomenologists show, especially with respect to perceptions, the *actual* contents are surrounded by other, as they say, *mitgegeben* aspects which do not fall within the focus of *consciousness* but which, nevertheless, are *present*. Focusing my sight on the entry door of a house, I still see, albeit only subconsciously, only in the corner of my eye, the windows immediately to the left and right of the door. Furthermore, although I see only the front of the house, its sides are also included, *mitgegeben*, in the *actual* phenomenon. The question now is where to stop such inclusions. I know that behind the house there is a park. It does not seem to be given, but is it *mitgegeben* too, or not? And in the park, there is a lake, behind which there is... It seems implausible to assume that all this is *mitgegeben*, for then all things ever experienced, unlimited if not infinite number of them, would belong to every phenomenon. There is the *horizon of actuality*, which seems to circumscribe the scope of *Mitgegebenheit*. In I:4.3.1, §§76 ff., we had the problem with the phenomenology of time, which did not account for the continuity across the limit of *actuality* towards the remote past. Likewise, here we encounter similar phenomenological break in which what is *mitgegeben* dissolves in the emptiness surrounding the *horizon of actuality*. And as in the case of time, so also here, there is a *distinction* but there is no border because we have to do with a continuity of experience.

*Mitgegebenheit* of objective (or, if one prefers, noematic) character has its limit which is the limit of the *horizon of actuality*. Somewhere, at the end of the front wall, behind the house, behind the lake, behind the park, *objects* and *complexes* cease to be *mitgegeben*, there are no more *objects* and *complexes*. Of course, it is enough to redirect one’s attention to bring in other, new or expected *objects* and connect them to the ones *actual* at the moment, but we are now considering an abstract, isolated *actuality* of *an experience*, so let us not stroll, not move sight around. What is *mitgegeben* behind this line are no more *objects* but ... *moods*, *impressions*, feelings, intuitions, *qualities*. *Mitgegebenheit* becomes eventually presence of *invisibles*. *Moods*, feelings, *qualities*, etc. are the concrete forms under which the potential infinity (of things, of experiences, of *Lebenswelt*) is *present* in every experience. If we were to use the objectivistic way of speaking, we might say: they do not bring in any *objects* but only unified signs which comprise the overwhelming number of possible *distinctions* within the limits of the *horizon of actuality*; although they do not make any more *objects actual*, they make them *present*, by providing *actual signs* which are nothing else than a comprised multiplicity of *objects*. But the objectivistic way of speaking loses its adequacy as behind the line of *moods* and *qualities*, behind the line where even the *actual* feelings become blurred and indistinct, there are still *invisibles*, the *inspirations* which oversee the whole *actual* situation. We can illustrate it on our figure from §1, p.101. The non-*actual* points on the circle (above the line of *actuality*) are all reflections of the ‘objective’ points from the line. They belong to the *actual* experience but only in the form of the *signs* on the circle. And the closer to the sphere of *invisibles* and the pole of the circle, the denser condensation of these images, with the pole reflecting the infinity of the line. This density of the images, the density of the increasing multitude of remote points of the line comprised into decreasing segments of the circle, would correspond now not only to the inseparability of *invisibles* but also to the unobjectifiable content of the *signs* of higher levels.

The concrete, *invisible* presence seems to underlie the intensity with which Merleau-Ponty’s <sup>147.</sup> searches for it in the structure of *actual experiences*. Although we might disagree with the focus on sensibility and the hunt for the ‘pure, raw, pre-reflective experience’, there is, nevertheless, much we can borrow from his descriptions. “Visible actuality is not *in* time and space nor, of course, *beyond* them, for there is nothing in front of it, after it nor around it, which might compete with its visibility. And yet it is not alone, it is not everything. Precisely: it occludes a further view, that is, both time and space extend around it and are *behind* it, hiding, in depth. In this way visible can fill or embrace me only because I who see it, do not see it from the depth of nothingness, but from its own interior, and seeing it I am also seen. Weight, density, content of every colour,

every sound, every tangible tissue, of actuality and of the very world come from that that the one who receives them feels as if he emerged from them through a kind of spiral or splitting movement, being originary homogeneous with them, from that he is a self-directed sensibility which, in turn, is in his eyes as if doubling and unfolding of his bodily tissue. Space and time of things are splinters of his own, of his spatiality and temporality, and not any multiplicity of units separated synchronically and diachronically; it is a relief combined from that which is simultaneous and that which follows after itself, spatial and temporal mesh in which, on the way of differentiation, units emerge. Things are now not in themselves, on their place and time, here, there, now, sometime; they exist only on the border of this spatial and temporal radiation emanating mysteriously from my sensibility. Their content is not the content of a pure object observed by the mind from a distance; I experience it from inside, as I am among the things, and they communicate through me as a feeling thing. Actuality, visibility – as the veil of memories for the psychoanalysts – has for me an absolute valor only because of its hidden, unlimited content of past, future, and that which is beyond it and which it announces but also hides.”<sup>198</sup>

148. Just like we have equated *transcendence* with the *non-actual, non-actual* and eventually the *invisible*, we can equate *immanence* with pure *actuality*. Both terms are only abstractions which can hardly be dissociated from each other. *Immanence, actuality* and *visibility*, arises at the limit of the process of differentiation, as a final stage of encircling the ‘hidden, unlimited content’ within the *horizon of actuality*. Although it allows *reflection* to oppose it to the *transcendence*, the latter does not disappear in the process of *actualisation*, it penetrates the *actuality* with all the levels lying above it. *Presence* is an expression of this insoluble involvement of *immanence* into *transcendence*.

The eventual *transcendence*, the *origin* is never accessible to the categories of *immanence*, is ‘neither this nor that’, is never *visible* and yet, is always most deeply *present*. *Self* is, after all, its trace, the trace of *birth*, and the eventual terminus of this trace is the *actual subject*. All levels are present in any, also *actual experiences*, and the *invisibility* of the *origin* is what remains the same also across all temporal *experiences*. Using the categories of reflective oppositions, the *actual* is the opposite, and hence incommensurable, with the *non-actual*. But, in fact, the most *transcendent*, the ultimately *invisible* is that which penetrates all *visibility*, which is most intimately, even if not *visibly, present*, and which therefore is the most *immanent*. The rest of the *origin* remains *present* throughout the life, in every *actual situation*, but only as the *rest* – it cannot be grasped, but it gives taste to everything within the *horizon of actuality*.

149. The father said: “Place this salt in water, and come to me tomorrow morning.”

The son did as he was told.

Next morning the father said, “Bring me the salt which you put in the water.”

The son looked for it, but could not find it; for the salt, of course, had dissolved.

The father said, “Taste some water from the surface of the vessel. How is it?”

“Salty.”

“Taste some from the middle. How is it?”

“Salty.”

“Taste some from the bottom. How is it?”

“Salty.”<sup>199</sup>

### 2.2.2. The ontological founding

150. Another word for the *unity of experience*, the *unity* which either reaches all the way to the *origin* or else seems completely absent, is “*concreteness*”. It has little to do with the *precision* and determinacy of an *object*, although such meaning will often be ascribed the word. A pure, isolated sensation is not *concrete*, in fact, it is a very abstract thing. It lacks all the layers of *non-actuality* which would anchor it in a *concrete experience*, that is, in an *experience* of a person. It is exactly the experiences where things get objectified and externalised, where they lose connection and relevance for you, *experiences* of, say, impersonal nature, which are least *concrete*. Typically, they will involve very precisely discriminated *objects* but the price for this *precision* is the loss of *concrete clarity*. *Clarity*, not *precision*, is the characteristic feature of *concreteness*. And it is

<sup>198</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. Inquiry and intuition; p.120-121

<sup>199</sup> Chandogya Upanishad [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*. p.4]

grounded in the personal character of experience, that is, in the character which experience gains from the presence of the *non-actual* aspects, eventually, from the presence of the most personal aspect of *invisibility*.

We, or generally, living beings, are those who bring *non-actuality* into the world – *non-actuality*, that is, subjectivity.<sup>200</sup> One *actual* experience may differ significantly from another one by its *objective* content, its particular meaning, etc. But every such experience, every meeting with a particular, *actual* being, is at the same time a thoroughly *concrete* confrontation with Being in its full and undisguised *presence*. This Being may seem veiled by the *actuality*, since it never appears as a pure *visibility* for *reflection* but, as a matter of fact, this *non-actuality*, this ‘veil’ of *invisibility* is its true and only form of *presence*, if you like, the only mode of our access to it. “If coincidence is lost, then it is not an accident; if Being remains hidden, then this is precisely its very feature and no unveiling will allow us understand it.”<sup>201</sup>

The presence of all higher levels in every *actual* experience reflects the order of ontological *found-ing*. It can be seen as inverse to the epistemic founding which begins with the *actual dissociations* of *reflection* and strives after the known, because experienced, but apparently abstract and unthinkable, *unity*.<sup>151.</sup>

Even if presence coincides in objective time with the *actuality* of an experience, the two are very different. Primarily, *present* are *invisibles*, while only *objects* and *visible* contents can be *actual*. The difference concerns both the mode of presentation and the contents. One might be tempted to say: *actuality* is the objectified expression of *presence* and *presence* is the *non-objectifiable actuality*. Or else, *presence* is a witness whose testimony is not reducible to the epistemological, that is, reflective categories of *actuality* and *objectivity*.

Referring presence of *invisibles* to the ontological *foundation*, we should keep in mind that *actuality* is only the ultimate narrowing of reality which extends far beyond the *horizon of actuality*. The *virtual invisibles*, necessarily involved into the *actuality* as they are, are thoroughly real. It is not so that only the *actual signs* and expressions lend them any reality. In fact, the *actuality* of *objects* is only the *sign* of the *founding* reality and as such (as well as by its correlation with *reflection*) can be considered to have more epistemic, rather than ontological, character. *Presence* is *concrete* reality and *actuality* only its abstract, precise modification. *Virtuality* is already a fully consummated reality of *invisible* – not merely its latency, not a mere potentiality for *actualisation*. It is effective and experienced even if it is *present* only in its deepest, most *virtual* form, even if it never reaches the level of *actualisation* in a *manifesting sign*. One can live a deeply joyful and satisfying life without any direct, plain thoughts of it, without even any frequent *actual experiences* of joy and satisfaction. Yet, even then one will know that one’s life is satisfying, although one may be unable to explain precisely why and how. Not all reality must become *actual*; most important aspects of it never do.

Critique of *actuality* has always proceeded from the standpoint of *non-actuality*. This can be taken in the direction of subjectivity (as endowing the *actual* givens with meaning if not also with being), in the direction of *absoluteness* (as transcending the relativity of *here-and-now*), in the direction of *vague imprecision* (as transcending the *precision* of *immediacy*). We thus see how a series of examples conform to the same, albeit very rough and general, pattern. Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegel from the point of ‘extreme subjectivity’ and existential relevance, Bergson’s critique of space and objectified time of science from the point of lived duration, Heidegger’s critique of the epistemically oriented ‘metaphysics of beings’ from the point of ‘Being’ and fundamental ontology, Derrida’s critique of the ‘metaphysics of actuality’ from the point of inter-permeability of opposites and undefinability of concepts, the general dissatisfaction with the conceptual analyses from the point of concrete existence, even mystics’ reservations against philosophical theology from the point of ‘ineffable unity’, are all essentially the same critique of epistemic focus on *actuality* from the point of ontological foundation which escapes ‘objectivity’ and merges with the personal origins. The list could be prolonged indefinitely, so let us only add the antique, Platonic and neo-Platonic, and later Christian opposition between the world of senses and the world of spirit. The recurring

<sup>200</sup>“Subjectivity” must be taken here in the most broad and generous sense of this term. It is, in fact, opposite to our *subjectivity* which is pure *immediacy dissociated* from the equally *immediate objectivity*. Here it is simply that which is opposed to the *actuality* of the ‘givens’, the overhead brought into the situation by the participants and not any *objective* facts. Cf. 1.4.4.vii.

<sup>201</sup>M. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. p.128

praise of the renunciation of the former for the latter is based on the conflation of ‘senses’ with the *immediate actuality* of the founded and transitory (which is at once taken as ‘unreal’) and ‘spirit’ with the supra-personal, yet always somehow personal, *non-actuality* of the *founding* (and therefore ‘true and real’) *origin*.

### 2.2.3. Traces

We have distinguished *presence* from its *manifestations* through the *actual signs*, emphasizing its independence from such *manifestations*. These two – ontological presence and its *manifestations* – express only the extreme poles of the unity which is maintained throughout all the levels. *Actuallisierung* amounts to *dissociation* of higher *nexus* into more *actual elements*. This *dissociation* proceeds only gradually and every *actual distinction* carries the character of the *nexus* from which it arose, as the *actual sign* of a continuous *trace*. Such *traces* connect not only the adjacent levels but traverse the whole hierarchy reaching from the *immediacy* all the way to the ultimate *origin*. We have, for instance, seen in Book I how the *immediate objectivity* arises as a *trace of actuality*, *signification* and, eventually, the event of *confrontation*. The characteristic feature of a *trace* is that it cannot be fully grasped within the level at which it appears; it is clearly understood, in any case seems perfectly *visible*, yet what is so *visible* is only the *actual signs*. Any account of it leads beyond the comprehensibility of the *visible* elements with which it is associated. We give two more examples of *traces*: identity and truth.

#### 2.2.3.i. Identity

We have seen the variations of the identity notion through the preceding sections: in the idealisation of *immediacy* and *actuality* to the residual, self-identical ‘substances’, in constitution of things as limits of *distinctions*, in the *posited totalities* of the world and *myself*, in the *unity of self*. These variations reflect only the different elements encountered on the trace of identity, as if different points marked on a continuous line passing through all the levels.

Leaving and then returning to a room, I re-cognise the cup on the table as the same which was there a while ago. The cup *here-and-now* points to the one *there-and-then*. True, it points in a very specific way making the identification of the two immediate, but it does point nevertheless, that is, it is now a *sign as a sign*, a *sign* whose non-identity with – the potential distinction from – the signified is given along with the very identity of the two. The difference is the difference of the *actuality here-and-now* and the *actuality there-and-then*. Identity seems to connect the two, stretching across the time interval which separates them. An experience of identity arises as an instance of a repetition which, in turn, seems to presuppose memory. So we will start with a few general remarks on that. Then, still in the preliminary fashion, we will comment briefly on the unnecessarily exaggerated role of language in establishing identities. After this introduction, we will discuss in more detail various forms of identity.

### Memory

We forget many things. But what does it mean? Do they simply disappear, as if never happened? Certainly not. What we usually mean by memory is related to particular facts and *actual events* which are stored in the *precise form* ready to be fetched with a satisfactory exactitude of detail. This ability varies greatly for it happens often that such *precise things* get dissolved in subconsciousness and have to be fetched back, as it may happen in psychoanalysis. But probably not even Freudians would assume the possibility of a total recall of everything that ever happened. Some things just get lost, not in the subconsciousness from which they might be restored in unchanged form, but in a complete ... *virtuality*. They are not kept ‘the way they were experienced’ but get as if ‘compressed’, mingled with other contents losing their rigidity, precision and identity.

153. According to Piaget, memory is a function very similar to intelligence and “the development of memory with age is the history of gradual organisations closely dependent on the structuring activities of intelligence.”<sup>202</sup> Can we know something without remembering it? Can we remember something without knowing it? Such Wittgensteinian questions do not, perhaps, await any

<sup>202</sup>J. Piaget, *Memory and Intelligence*. p.381 [after H. J. Silverman, ed., *Piaget, Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. p.75]

answers, but we may try. Knowing and remembering involve both the ability to re-produce or re-cognise. Knowing Pythagorean theorem requires, in particular, that I remember it, am able to state it on demand. But it involves more than mere remembrance. What more? This is unclear, but it might be that I should also be able to use it in various situations, to recognise the situations where it does *not* apply, perhaps, also to justify or prove it. On the other hand, when I remember the theorem, is it possible that I do not know, do not understand it? In principle, this seems possible, I can be able to re-state the theorem without, however, being able to discern adequate meaning in it, I just remember the formulation. If I am to apply it, or to decide if it is applicable, I can be forced to work through it again, try to re-call, or figure out anew, its meaning, etc. Taking it this way, memory is only some minimal precondition of knowing or, as the case may be, is some residual rest which remains from richer knowledge as its elements gradually disappear – from memory.

What is this rest? What happened to the elements which disappeared? Even if I forgot most of them, it is much easier to bring them forth in my understanding than it is when learning the theorem for the first time. They did not disappear completely, they only as if waned away, but are still – somewhere, somewhat – around. Consider now what happens when we are thinking. I can work intensely with the theorem, setting various elements explicitly ‘before my eyes’, trying to connect them, deduce consequences. This is the most active, attentive thinking. When, trying several times, I get stuck unable to reach the desired solution, the best thing to do can be to forget the whole problem for a while. To literally *forget* it, erase it from the horizon of conscious attention. It happens almost typically that the solution, or a new creative suggestion, will just appear after some time (cf. 1.4.2.i). ‘Thinking’ is obviously going on in the background while one is not thinking actively and deliberately. It should not be all too daring to propose that such a subconscious ‘thinking’ works not only with other materials which one could, if one wanted to, bring to *actual* attention but also with contents similar to those which started to wane away but did not quite disappear from the memory. In fact, the creative solution one obtains in this way, involves often exactly such an element which was not available to immediate introspection. We might say, thinking reaches here into deeper layers of memory than active, attentively controlled thinking.

“The image [*Vorstellung*] of pain is not a picture [*Bild*] and *this* image is not replaceable in the language-game by anything we should call a picture. [...] An image is not a picture, but a picture may correspond to it.”<sup>203</sup> What do you remember remembering, say, Eiffel Tower? Wittgenstein would ask: try to describe it! Try to describe what you are seeing (with your closed eyes) when you are trying to recollect Eiffel Tower. You end up describing what you would draw if you were asked to, you end up describing a picture. But you do not *see* this picture. With your eyes closed, trying to recall Eiffel Tower, you are trying to *actualise* it as a picture. But what are you trying to *actualise*? What is ‘there’ to be *actualised*? While ‘picture’ is what can be given as an *immediate object*, what can be re-produced and re-presented, so ‘image’ corresponds to a more *virtual* element which simply does not have any unique *representation*, it only has many different *actualisations*. Recalling Eiffel Tower you can draw it in various ways, you can describe it with various words and pictures. “The image must be more like its object than any picture. [...] it is essential to the image that it is the image of *this* and nothing else.” Thus one might come to regard the image as a super-likeness.<sup>204</sup> Suggesting that image is *virtuality* of a picture (of many pictures) we have stretched its meaning a bit further.<sup>205</sup> For remembering Eiffel Tower is not so very different from understanding/knowing pain: we have some (yes, a bit mysterious) ‘image’ which can only be *actualised* in various pictures. To recognise pain of a burning moth or wriggling fly, you have to see them as *actual* pictures of a *vague* image: pain; just like to recognise a particular drawing you have to see it as a possible *actualisation* of the image of Eiffel Tower,

<sup>203</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:300-301.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid. I:389. Let us also point out the close connection between ‘image’ and ‘aspect’: “The concept of an aspect is akin to the concept of an image. In other words: the concept ‘I am now seeing it as...’ is akin to ‘I am now having *this* image.’” [Ibid. II:xii] Different as these concepts may be in Wittgenstein, both are closely related to our *nexus* and *aspect*. Discerning, eventually, ‘words of thought’ as only a germ in our mind, Wittgenstein concludes: “If God had looked into our minds he would not have been able to see there whom we were speaking of.” [Ibid. II:xii] What is there reminds more of *virtual* *nexus* rather than of any *visible* pictures.

<sup>205</sup>Primarily, in that Wittgenstein sees it only in the context of (the sentences describing) *actual* imagining, so that “[s]eeing an aspect and imagining are subject to the will.” [Ibid. II:xii]

and like to use the theorem in an *actual* situation you have to find the ‘way it applies’, you have to subsume the *actual* situation under the generality of the theorem. Even if the last case is simply a subsumption of a particular instance under a general rule, it can be seen as related to the other cases where a particular picture illustrates, or *actualises* an image. (For the *relation* of instantiation is no less mysterious than that of exemplification or *actualisation*.) This image is no longer any *actual* representation but a more *vague nexus* which no longer has a *dissociated* existence of merely *actual object*, but is rooted in the deeper layers of *virtuality*. The difficulty with remembering is to reproduce an *actual* picture from this *virtual nexus*, is to recall anew various aspects of the understood theorem. “The difficulty is not that I doubt whether I really imagined [Eiffel Tower, pain or] anything red. But it is *this*: that we should be able, just like that, to point out or describe the colour that we have imagined, that the projection of the image into reality presents no difficulty at all.”<sup>206</sup>

155. Understanding amounts to integration of particular elements into appropriate contexts; integration, that is, ability to fetch them in appropriate situations for particular purposes. Likewise, memory includes (images of the) remembered things into deeper, more *virtual* layers of our being, from which they can be fetched as *actual* pictures. The image-like character of remembered things, this indefinite and indescribable entity, reflects the degree of its involvement into the *totality* of other elements and, eventually, *unity of existence*. An effect of this inclusion, of an element becoming an integral part of the whole, is, rather naturally, that the element’s identity becomes less recognisable – no longer a precise picture, *actual statement*, but a *vague image*.<sup>207</sup> Consequently, memory is not a mere recording machine which may, possibly, influence the present (the view which Piaget attributes to Freud and Bergson). It involves a successive and constant re-organisation by a process of “active and selective structuring.”<sup>208</sup> All our adult “memories, no matter how trivial, isolable, or individualised, involve a host of spatial, temporal, causal, and other relations, and a whole hierarchy of planes of reality.”<sup>209</sup> Redressing Freud’s analysis of the Wolf-man dream in terms of Piaget’s theory, Casey arrives at the following schema:

$$\left( \dots \left( ((M_0 \rightleftharpoons M_1) \rightleftharpoons M_2) \rightleftharpoons M_3) \rightleftharpoons \dots \right) \rightleftharpoons M_r$$

$M_0$  is the original event and the following  $M_i$ ’s the successive memories (or other influencing experiences) of it until the present recollection  $M_r$ . The arrows  $\rightleftharpoons$  at each stage represent the interaction and mutual influence of the involved elements. This may be a more realistic picture of the workings of memory, confirmed also by various experiments of Piaget’s.<sup>210</sup> You can not remove your past – you can only change it.

156. The crucial point is that an analogous picture can be applied also to particular events and things which we do *not* remember. They get surrounded by other events and experiences, conscious or not, remembered or not, and gradually lose their identity retreating further and further, and

<sup>206</sup>Ibid. I:386

<sup>207</sup>We can recall the increasing ‘density’ of the images close to the pole, as the projected points of the line lie further and further away from the circle – I:6.4.§167.

<sup>208</sup>J. Piaget, *Memory and Intelligence*. p.378. By the way, this fundamental point is consistently ignored by all pedagogy which, assuming artificial *dissociation* of memory and thinking, tries in a single-minded fashion to motivate every single step of its procedure and to develop ‘understanding’ before, or even instead of ‘memory’, by releasing pupils from the boring memorization drill. Memorization develops deeper structures of organising materials, than mere smartness, possibly developed by training in puzzle-solving.

<sup>209</sup>Ibid. p.131

<sup>210</sup>E. S. Casey, *Piaget and Freud on Childhood Memory*. This picture is to some extent consistent with the memory built as a retentional continuum in which the current retention of the previous phase retains also the retention of this previous phase, which itself contains retention of its predecessor, and so on. The crucial difference (besides the fact that we are not concerned exclusively with consciousness) is that here it is not a mere accumulation of the past phases, but that each stage may influence both its successor *and* its predecessor. Also this observation goes back at least to the phenomenologists around Husserl. Scheler, for instance, remarks: “[E]very experience of our past remains unready with respect to value and undetermined with respect to meaning, as long as not all of its inherent effectualities have been released. Only in the totality of the whole life, when we have died, the experience will become an unchangeable fact with ready meaning, like the past natural events are from the very start.” [M. Scheler, *Repentance and Rebirth*. p.34] «... so ist auch jedes Erlebnis unserer Vergangenheit noch wert *unfertig* und sinn *unbestimmt*, solange es nicht *alle* seine ihm möglichen Wirksamkeiten geleistet hat. Erst im Ganzen des Lebenszusammenhangs gesehen, erst wenn wir gestorben sind [...], wird so ein Erlebnis zu jener sinnfertigen, ‘unveränderlichen’ Tatsache, wie es die in der Zeit zurückliegenden Naturereignisse von Hause aus sind.»

merging into the sphere of *virtuality*. “As the time-object withdraws into the past, it shrinks and therewith becomes dim.”<sup>211</sup> At the present moment,  $M_r$  is confronted with the whole past which, indeed, is not given as a collection of bits and pieces glued together, but as a *virtual unity* of ... the past. It involves things we remember, and can *actualise*, as well as those we do not, and which we can not. Some might have been lost forever for *actual* recollection, yet they remain present, albeit transformed beyond possible recognition, dissolved and de-identified. The picture is not exactly like the one above but rather something like:

$$(\dots ((\left( \begin{array}{c|c} \bullet & \vdots \\ \hline M_1 & M'_1 \\ \vdots & M'_2 \\ & M''_2 \end{array} \right) \Rightarrow M_3) \Rightarrow \dots) \Rightarrow M_r$$

Well known examples – of integration of the *actual* facts and observations into the totality of our *experience* – concern learning almost anything, in particular, some skills like riding a bicycle. The scattered pieces of advice from the instructor, the failed attempts to master one particular movement at a time, the intense consciousness trying to organise all the bits in proper sequences and alliances of movements – all that continues until one ‘gets it’. And although we tend to focus on the exact moment when we ‘get it’ for the first time, it is not the moment which is important but the fact that all the labourious details, all the minute successes and failures recede into the background of almost unconscious automatism. The emerging consistency of the totality is a qualitative change in relation to the tiny details which led to this emergence. The moment of ‘getting it’ represents the formation of a new *virtual unit*, which ‘falls in place’, gets integrated with the *totality* of other elements. The examples are not, of course, limited to acquiring motoric skills – learning to solve differential equations has exactly the same structure of painful details receding gradually into the background of the acquired skill.

In case it were said that here one is still able to voluntarily *actualise* the acquired skill, and so it does not really illustrate the transition into *virtuality*, let us consider some other examples.

As we described in the opening sections of Book I, the lack of memories from the earliest days and hours of our existence is not due to the lack of memory but of anything specific to remember. In the beginning we do not collect memories of any *actual* things or events, but only some *virtual* traces which only later get differentiated into more *precise* forms. These primal *traces*, too, may be called “memories”, albeit only in our generous sense of the word.

A still more illustrative example may be that of imperfect memories, memories which lost not only some of the original details but *all* of them. Proust describes also the extreme cases when the *actual* element triggers the search for its past counterpart which, however, fails; e.g.: “[...] I sensed the smell of the cherries on the table and nothing else. [...] I could not, however, choose anything from the confused, known and forgotten impressions; eventually, after a short while, I ceased seeing anything and my memory for ever immersed itself in sleep.”<sup>212</sup> One might say: the smell triggers a recollection which either became completely unrecognisable, or at least is so in the current moment; (an event of) memory without anything remembered.<sup>213</sup>

In many situations, what remains are not any specific details but only *vague* feelings of the atmosphere, of the character of the situation, of the general impression which was *actual* then or, perhaps, which is so only now and in some way gets referred, ‘connected’ to the original experience. Particular things may, as with Proust, play a role but only auxiliary one, of a trigger. Memories, according to Proust, do not *live* in things, they are only imprisoned there. Memories, “every hour of our life, once it has passed into the past, incarnates into some material object and remains hidden there, imprisoned until we meet it on our way.”<sup>214</sup> This ‘imprisonment’ should be taken as a mere metaphor of the potential to trigger a recollection: the *actual* things are needed only to *awake* the memories from their sleep, that is, to awake the mind from its sleep in mere *actuality*.

<sup>211</sup>E. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*. A:1.2.§9. «Indem das zeitliche Objekt in die Verrgangenheit rückt, zieht es sich zusammen und wird dabei zugleich dunkel.»

<sup>212</sup>M. Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve*. Introduction

<sup>213</sup>A similar and common case: “I know this person, I am sure I know him but ... who is he? Where do I know him from?” *Recognition* of the remembered ‘image’ precedes here *actual* and conscious remembering. The person emerges from the surrounding (*virtual* background) already marked with the sign of his identity (the image is like a super-likeness of its object) – even though consciousness still needs to decipher the tokens of this identity, to fetch the detailed pictures.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid.

devoid the enlivening presence of memories. Particular things, and their remembrance, are only expressions of the true life of memories; “voluntary memory, the memory of intelligence and eyes reproduces the past only as an imperfect image, which resembles the original as much as the pictures of bad painters resemble spring.”<sup>215</sup> “Compared to this past which is an intimate part of ourselves, the truths of intelligence seem little real.”<sup>216</sup>

Such ‘emotional memory’, which is an intimate part of ourselves, is more frequent than we commonly admit. For in *actual* terms what counts is the ‘voluntary memory’, are the *precise details* which we are able to recount and recollect in the *actual* context, not any ‘subjective’ feelings. Yet, much of the childhood memories consist often of exactly such *moods* and *impressions*. Reading a book for the second time after 10 years, only some details will re-emerge from memory as you encounter them again. Many of them you simply do not remember. Yet, you will very quickly re-cognise the general impression the book made on you, you will recognise the image by means of a few pictures. Only some accidental *actual* element is needed: to hear the sound of a dropped tea-spoon to recall Combray and the childhood home, to stumble over the uneven pavement in front of the palace of the Guermantes to recall the walk in Venice. The recollections do not necessarily come back in all the details, but only with the details which establish the connection between the two points in time. Beyond that, what is being recollected are the significant *signs* of the more *virtual* elements, of the context, atmosphere and mood without which the memories would remain *dissociated* and lifeless chips.

157. ‘Voluntary memory’, the memory of intelligence and *reflection* is only one layer of memory, just like the *actually dissociated* ‘givens’ constitute only the lowest layer of any present situation. These layers of their respective threads, ‘voluntary memory’ and *objects*, mark in fact both the same level, are both *aspects* of the same *nexus of objectivity*.

“A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come the day after tomorrow? – And *what* can he not do here? – How do I do it? – How am I supposed to answer this?//Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life.”<sup>217</sup> Recall two kinds of time (consciousness) from I:4.3.1.i. §§76 ff: the phenomenal time of *actual now*, with all its retentions and protentions vs. the objective time of ‘inauthentic consciousness of time, of remote past’. Expecting somebody’s arrival the day after tomorrow (or next year) presupposes consciousness of objective time, simply because having at all the idea of ‘next year’ requires such consciousness. We could say: if dog does not expect his master to arrive next week, this happens for the same reasons for which he does not consider how the ball he is playing with feels in the hand of his master nor, for that matter, where *this* very ball was made.<sup>218</sup> We do not imagine dogs to relate to the possible difference between *this* very ball and another though indistinguishable one, that is, to have consciousness of objectivity. But a dog can await and expect its master’s arrival, and long for him the more, the longer is his absence. For dogs, too, live in the temporality with its past and future. They live in the same time as we do and are aware of the same time – only this awareness does not reach the crispness of *objective dissociations*.

Reflective *signs as signs*, constituting the *foundation* of language, enter likewise into the *nexus of objectivity*. Serving as important tools of ‘freezing’ some (limits of) *distinctions* (I:5.1), they serve likewise as tools of ‘voluntary memory’ or, as we also could say, *objective memory*. We may have vivid ‘emotional’ recollections of some particularly significant events from our remote past. But for the most, what happened to us five years ago is not remembered ‘in flesh’ but merely as abstract descriptions. I can say: “Five years ago I was in Prague, I walked past *Malostranské*

<sup>215</sup> M. Proust in a letter to René Blum.

<sup>216</sup> M. Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve*. Introduction

<sup>217</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. II:i

<sup>218</sup> Promising is likewise a good example of this crossing point, of *actuality* lying at the point where the *foundation* in the deeper *unity* across time meets the ‘frozen’ aspect of objectivity. It is will, patience and perseverance which are capable of stretching the influences of *actuality* to remote future, and all these presuppose objective time. Opposing the autonomous man with independent will to the mere moralistic follower of custom, Nietzsche points to how the *unity* in the objective time is internalised, existentially grounded in the former and only *externally* accepted by the latter: “the sovereign individual who resembles nothing except himself and who again is freed from the morality of custom [...] is] the man possessed of a personal, independent, and long-lasting will and who is competent to make promises.” [F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. II:3] The *competence* to make promises, unlike the mere customary ability to make them, is an expression of the lived *unity*, of the lived understanding that I am one person, immersed in but also independent from the flow of objective time. Evading promises one had made amounts to estranging oneself from one’s past which, eventually, means alienating oneself from oneself.

*náměsti* almost every day, I ate dinner several times at this place,” etc., but all these events are recalled as mere facts, as merely *objective* facts which would feel and could be described almost exactly the same way if I were relating events from a movie or sketching an imaginary story I planned to write. Of course, I am relating my own past and it is still some *virtual* image which underlies these recollecting descriptions. So, in principle, one might manage that also without objective time? But the role of objective time, and words, is quite crucial. Objective time allows us to refer to such a remote event which has been forgotten, just like single *objects* or situations trigger, according to Proust, vivid ‘emotional’ memories. One asks: “What did you do in the summer for five years ago?” Without objective time such a question would not make any sense and without words it could not be asked. Events in our life do not carry any inherent time stamp on them. One can remember meeting somebody and have no idea if it was two, three or five years ago. One can remember two distinct events and be unable to say which happened before which. Experiences become mutually related and organised along the line of *objective* time. Without it they would only interlock in a *virtual* mesh, losing their identities and hence disappearing for future recollections. Even if we could, in some unclear and unspecified sense, remember our whole life while living at some *pre-reflective* and *pre-objective* level, we would have no means to fetch these ‘memories’ and *actualise* them. And what is a memory which can not be recalled? The events would simply keep dissolving in the *virtuality* of our past, forming us, as experiences form also character of a dog. But the whole process would remain *unreflected* and hidden in the same *virtuality* which *founds* it.

Just like *actuality* of reflection is *founded* in the hierarchy of higher aspects, so also the *reflective* memory has its deeper presuppositions. The first is that it is needed at all. And it is because life and world are not a whole given in the unity of one act but are split into diversity of separate *actualities*. The need for memory, just like for ideal entities, arises with the *dissociating* activity of *reflective* experience and is the more intense the more precisely *dissociated* become the contents of our attention. 158.

The second presupposition is that it is what actually takes place, that I *actually* remember *the same*. This ‘repetition as recurrence’ requires the possibility of *re-cognising* identity of the same across time. As we suggested discussing time in I:§§82 ff, and as we will elaborate below, this is possible because new things and *experiences* are not ‘added’ to any given collection but, like everything else, emerge as results of differentiation from the *indistinct* origin. More specifically, such ‘repetitions’ express the *recognitions* which are not necessarily limited to pure *horizon of actuality*. They arise from *virtual* *nexus* whose *unity* precedes *dissociation* of *actualities*. Memory, as *reflective re-cognition*, is *an experience of a recognition* transcending the *horizon of actuality*.

And thus we arrive at the most fundamental, even if entirely trivial, assumption: memory can take place only in a being whose unity stretches across time, whose unity is not an *immediate* self-identity limited to pure *immediacy* but *transcends* its horizon. “All beings confessedly continue the same, during the whole time of their existence. [...] All these successive actions, enjoyments, and sufferings, are actions, enjoyments and sufferings, of the same living being. And they are so, prior to all consideration of its remembering and forgetting [...]”<sup>219</sup> Memory does not establish identity nor is it constitutive for personal identity – at most, it can help establishing the sense, the feeling of it. Losing memory, one does not necessarily lose *oneself*, and even without remembering anything of one’s past one can still know *that* one had a past. It is not, for this reason, a mere ontic accident or an epistemological device. It is one of the fundamental aspects disclosing in *actual experiences* the *foundation* of this *actuality* in the continuity through time and, in the last instance, in the *unity* of existence.

## Language

Language provides common – and quite practical in their roughness – means for drawing the boundaries between things. If I cut off the branches, what is left is a ‘trunk’ and no longer a ‘tree’; if I cut the whole ‘trunk’, what is left is only a ‘stump’. But, of course, we have no idea how low the stump must be to be a ‘stump’ and not a ‘trunk’, nor how many branches must be cut off for a ‘tree’ to become a ‘trunk’. Growing up into a language which has only one word for, say, both “pain” and “suffering”, one would tend to consider the two as identical and, in any case, reflective 159.

<sup>219</sup>J. Butler, *The Analogy of Religion*. Appendix I

establishment of the distinction would probably take much longer time and might even appear as a deep discovery. If eighteen or so Hebrew words for different shades of ‘purity’ get translated by the same Greek word “*katharos*”, then the meaning of the Old Testament must undergo some, hopefully only slight, changes. But claiming that without the linguistic means, one is entirely incapable of experiencing the difference, would be like claiming that the lack of names for many colours and their shades makes also experiencing the actual differences impossible. The identities and distinctions sedimented in the language express only roughly the average relevance, as well as the historical development – they are passed as pragmatic guidelines, but they *never determine* the range of the possible experiences of identity and difference. The relativity of identities (and possibly also of elaborate systems thereof) can be discerned by observing some differences between languages.

160. Slavic languages provide almost unlimited means for modifying the nouns by means of suffixes – not only to form chains of diminutives, but also to indicate features and impressions the things make on one, as if stretching and comprising the stem, which in other languages would require unbearable series of adjectives.<sup>220</sup> In fact, most nouns can be turned, or dissolved, by such means into adjectives. The ontology, the collection of identities, seems to dissolve in a landscape of grades, variations and qualities without any definite and final ‘substances’. In Germanic languages one utilises much more the opposite operation to that just mentioned of forming adjectives from nouns, namely, one which results in a noun formed from an adjective (the suffix -ness in English, -heit in German). A language like German, where the etymological connections between words are still very tight, but variations less flexible, where the formation of compound words (in particular, nouns, practically absent in Slavic languages) seems to reflect the structure of entities, will suggest ontology of hierarchies and systematic relations between basic entities, and by the same token, emphasize the division between the natural and rational, the given and the constructed element. A language like English, an enormous collection of words from multilingual sources, which provide great flexibility, but even when expressing very close and related phenomena, remain etymologically unrelated, will suggest ontology of minute, mutually independent elements. The identities, as well as the character of the identity itself, are instinctively established by means of the dissociated atoms, unrelated words.

As a more specific example let us consider only the word for ‘reality’ and its folk-etymology. We are not asking for any genuine etymology. It is the superficial, pseudo-etymological or even merely phonetic associations rather than the scientific etymology which may – may! – influence a child, long before it possibly might start studying linguistics.

English “reality” gives hardly any immediate associations. Sure, one can think of some Latin origins from “res” but these are too advanced considerations for us. It is but another word, as unrelated to “house” as to “thing” or “activity”. The conceptual correlate, something like the definition of ‘reality’ in a Merriam-Webster dictionary: “something that is neither derivative nor dependent but exists necessarily”, seems as empty and abstract as the lack of any deeper linguistic relatedness which it reflects.

German “Wirklichkeit” is an entirely different matter. It is bound to be associated, unconsciously and often consciously, with “Wirkung”, “wirken”, etc. “Wirklichkeit” is something that acts, works, is efficacious, it is a power rather than a state. “The world of the real is a world in which this acts on that, changes it and again experiences reactions itself and is changed by them. [...] What value could there be for us in the eternally unchangeable which could neither undergo effects nor have effects on us? Something entirely and in every respect inactive would be unreal and non-existent for us.”<sup>221</sup> Well ... spoken by a true philosopher of language.

Polish “rzeczywistość” brings immediately associations with “rzeczy” – “things”. The suffix “-istość” has no inherent meaning (it is used to form many other words), but it may easily lead a layman to something like “istność”/“istnienie” – “being”, “existence”. Thus, ‘reality’ seems to be the state or order of things (all things?), something given rather than acting, and acting only in

---

<sup>220</sup>“Ptak” is a bird, “ptaszek” a small bird, “ptaszyna” an even smaller one, “ptasior” is a rather large and ugly, possibly dangerous bird, “ptaszydło” is an extremely repulsive “ptasior”, etc.

<sup>221</sup>G. Frege, *The thought: a logical inquiry*. p.103/104. [Emphasizing relativity of every *distinction* to the *distinguishing existence*, and claiming that to be is to be *distinguished*, we come very close to the idea of this last sentence. Every *distinction* makes a difference. However, the difference need not imply any activity and even less any effects of physical kind. It is exactly this aspect which is captured by “Wirklichkeit”. The same associations obtain in the Scandinavian languages, as well as in Russian.]

the way “being” acts – by simply being.

We are not linguists and all this is, of course, very rough. But could we not dare to look here, even 161. in such a superficial comparison and rough differences, for at least some reasons for the general differences between the philosophical schools which dominate the spheres of different language groups, just as it was argued that, for instance, Aristotle’s ontology, if not whole metaphysics, was firmly grounded in the Greek grammar and etymology? It seems that we could but we will leave such investigations aside. Each language has its *mood*, even its own *quality*, which only to some extent can be traced to the simple rules of grammar or etymological associations. But in spite of all such differences (reflected also in the indeterminacy of translation), different human languages have approximately the same differentiating and unifying power. Sure, some words, for expressing some particular *distinctions*, may be emphasized in one language and missing in another, and almost always more vague *distinctions* will be drawn across different, though hardly disjoint, semantic fields. But, in general, the *distinctions* expressed in one language can be reflected (even if sometimes only clumsily) in another – after all, and in spite of indeterminacy, a translation is possible. Above all, one person can always, even if only in principle, communicate to another, all such linguistic differences notwithstanding.<sup>222</sup> So we will leave language to the linguists and the fascination with its mystical (or, as one rather should say today, post-analytical) influences on the mind to those who have nothing better to influence their minds, and start discussing identity. We will steer away from language for although it is a means of drawing and establishing *distinctions*, it is *founded* in the ability to *distinguish* which is both prior to and much wider than the sphere of the actual signs, not to mention the mere words.

\* \* \*

### 1. *Immediate self-identity: $x = x$*

162.

The original repetition is a reflective ‘doubling’ of the same, extraction of something from the background and *positing* it as an independent, because *dissociated object*, I:§56, p. 23. The doubling brings forth the self-identity which is just the expression of the fact that doubling did not change the original phenomenon. The thing remains itself, it only gets doubled in the perspective of the reflective representation. “«A thing is identical with itself.» – There is no finer example of a useless proposition, which yet is connected with a certain play of imagination. It is as if in imagination we put a thing into its own shape and saw that it fitted. //We might also say: «Every thing fits into itself.»”<sup>223</sup> Every *object*, *dissociated* in the reflective ‘doubling’, remains itself (or so, at least, one would like to have it.)

Self-identity is the obviousness of the *immediacy*, of the fact that, within a timeless ‘now’, nothing can change and everything is itself. Everything, that is, which can be grasped in the *immediate* limit of a single *act*, and that is close to nothing. But self-identity (to be completely distinguished from any identity of the self), the empty formula  $x = x$ , becomes the paradigm, the governing norm of all further considerations of identity. The problems haunting these considerations are, as aptly illustrated by Wittgenstein’s analogy of ‘fitting into its itself’, the problems of determining the criteria of identity. These, in turn, reflect only metaphysical arbitrariness of what, among all temporal objects, could count as the ultimate ‘substances’. The problems with criteria of identity are the problems with classifying *actual* appearances, so to speak, fitting them into this *immediate* limit of self-identity.

### 2. *Actual identity: $a = b$*

163.

The original repetition is a reflective ‘doubling’ of the same. In most abstract terms, this is what also ‘repetition as recurrence’ is – the same thing seen from two, or more, different perspectives. But now, these perspectives are perspectives in a more intuitive sense of the word, they are ‘snapshots’, different *actualities*. Equality arises as a relation of sameness across distinct *actualities*, where a point  $a$  in  $A$  turns out to be the same as  $b$  in  $B$ . As Frege observed, the difference between  $a = a$  and  $a = b$  concerns the form of presentation. Just like the statement  $a = a$  does not say anything, the statement  $a = b$  says quite a lot – their *Erkenntniswert* is very

<sup>222</sup> And so there is nothing which prevents, for instance, the active, apparently Germanic *Wirklichkeit*, to appear in the Latin of 50 BC.: “whate’er exists, as of itself, //Must either act or suffer action on it.” [T. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*. I:4]

<sup>223</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:216

different. The former states merely the *immediate* self-identity, it “is valid a priori and, following Kant, is called analytic.”<sup>224</sup> The latter, on the other hand, says that *A* and *B* are two different perspectives, two different snapshots of something. This something, this ever transcendent *x*, arises precisely as the equality of *a* (i.e., *x* viewed as, or in the context of, *A*) and of *b* (i.e., *x* viewed as, or in the context of, *B*).<sup>225</sup>

Leaving and then returning to a room, I re-cognise the cup on the table as the same which was there a while ago. The cup *here-and-now* points to the one *there-and-then*. True, it points in a very specific way making the identification of the two immediate, but it does point nevertheless. What does it mean? That it is a *sign as a sign*, a *sign* whose non-identity with the signified is now given along with it? OK, but primarily, that *here-and-now*, the *actuality* of this cup, has been *dissociated* from the *actuality* of that cup, the two have lost any connection. This non-identity is the difference of *dissociated actualities*, *here-and-now* as opposed to *there-and-then*; it is posed by *reflection* which, having scattered various *actualities* across the time, dwells exclusively among the *dissociated experiences*.

On a closer look, that is, on some *self-reflection*, the very identity of I who am *reflecting* becomes only a mysterious quality for which *reflection* can not account in terms of *actuality*. How can I know, *actually* know and be sure, that I *reflecting* in this very moment am the same as I a while ago? There is no logical impossibility in assuming that the two are different and that everything is re-created anew in every instant, with the amazing precision creating merely an illusion that it is the same. It is obviously false or, if we do not like the word, it is not a fruitful or even meaningful way of speaking (showing, by the way, the value of such a criterion as ‘logical possibility’). At another level of experience I obviously know, i.e., *experience* the cup *here-and-now* and the one *there-and-then* as the same thing, and I know myself to be the same person today as I was yesterday. But where is the proof, where is the unshakeable certainty of the two being the same?

There is none. For *reflection*, burdened with the *dissociation* of all *actual experiences*, this identity is problematic, to say the least. Given two things separated into different *actualities*, their identity can not arise in (yet another) *actuality* otherwise than as some mysterious *x* which binds them across and in spite of the gap in time. Such an *x* is never *actually* experienced. Since Plato, one has been more than willing to say “Alas! An ideal entity. The cup here and the one before are just instances of the same. And what is this ‘the same’?... A universal.”<sup>226</sup> An *x*, an ideal cup existing beyond the *horizon of actuality* and binding together the cup *here-and-now* with the cup *there-and-then*. In order to account for the identity across different *actualities* – from the perspective of *actuality* – *reflection* ends up with postulating ideal entities. Identity is a trace of that *dissociation*, and so is the noumenal *x* which forever keeps receding beyond any horizon of *distinctions*.<sup>227</sup>

164. What is so mysterious about the two being the same? It is that one assumes from the start that the true givenness, true presentation happens only within the *horizon of actuality*. Whatever exceeds

---

<sup>224</sup>G. Frege, *On Meaning and Denotation*.

<sup>225</sup>Frege says that *a* and *b* are simply different signs and that identity is an epistemic relation between signs, which obtains when both have the same denotation, *Bedeutung*. This is probably what it becomes, eventually, in the *actual world* with its ready-made *objects*. Our point here will be, primarily, that this relation (or fact?) is *founded* and emerges as a residual *trace* in the process which first *dissociates* various *actualities*, and then must re-establish the connections between them. The ambiguity can be discerned in the naming. “Identity” seems to refer to the absolute fact, while “equality” to a relation between *a* and *b*. We will use both words at the present level.

<sup>226</sup>One would be cautious to distinguish a trivial repetition of the same (thing) from instances of a universal but the meaning and the pattern are exactly the same. As argued in 1.2.2, universals are but special case of *non-actualities*; a single repetition, an appearance of the same only twice, presents already all the problems of indeterminately long series of repetitions, of ideal entities or universals.

<sup>227</sup>At first, one may try saying things like that sameness means identity, which expresses the epistemological optimism that if *a* now is the same as *b* was then, so this sameness across the two *actualities* witnesses to the identity of the appearing thing. But quickly the natural consequence becomes relativisation of identity to the operations of the mind. Identity is not a ‘real’ relation, existing somehow ‘in’ the object, but arises only as a consequence of different perspectives under which mind views the object. Identity “can not be anything but a relation of reason, because it is not between things distinct except by reason only” [J. Duns Scotus, *Questions on the Metaphysics*. IX:1-2 [after A. Santogrossi, *Duns Scotus on potency opposed to act...*] (In the text, the quoted phrase concerns potency, but identity is given as an obvious example of the same kind of relation of mere reason. It is a relation which is not, like a formal distinction, real though mind-dependent but one which is actually caused by the mind in the object.)] Slightly more modern variant of the same idea figures, for instance, in G. Frege, *On Meaning and Denotation*, referred to in the beginning of this paragraph.

this horizon becomes suspicious, prone to deceiving us, uncertain. The paradigm of certainty is the *immediacy*, presence within *horizon of actuality* – this horizon, eventually the evanescent point of *immediacy*, is implicitly taken as the only point of contact with reality. Taking thus units of reflective experiences as the atoms of reality, one is, indeed, in dear need to invent ideal entities to keep the scattered pieces of *actualities* together. Ideal entities are reflective tools useful for organising reflective experiences – but the problem of their (ontological or other) status is based on the implicit conviction that the real is only the *actual* and that everything else requires a justification in terms of *actuality* and preferably of *immediacy*.

If we, instead of starting from *actual experiences*, start from the *unity of experience*, eventually of our being, which only subsequently gets diversified and split into *actualities*, then repetition is only an experience of the same from different perspectives, from different points of *actuality*. *Actual re-recognition* of *X* as the same as another *actual* (but not *actual now*) *Y* is a *recognition*, that is, an experience of *XY* which has manifested itself in two distinct *actualities*. It is not one, *actual* I perceiving *X* who somewhat has to establish a relation to another I who perceived *Y*. The moment of perceiving *X* is but an *actuality* emerging from the background of experience where *X* is but the *actual* aspect of *XY*. Its definite separation is only the result of reflective dissociation.

Does it mean that every *X* which is experienced as (a repetition of) *Y*, is actually the same as *Y*? Can't I be mistaken in taking *X* for *Y*? Well, no and yes.

I can't be mistaken because any such experience of repetition has a reason, there is always something which – in my experience – finds the *re-recognition* of *X* as the same as *Y*. It is a *cut through experience* which, *distinguishing XY*, precedes the dissociation of *actual X* from the *actual* (though not now) *Y*. I may *actually* not know what it is, I may even, in principle, never be able to account at the level of *reflection* for this *XY*, and yet the very fact of repetition could not take place without such an *XY*. After all everything originates from *one*.

But from the objectivistic point of view, that is, assuming the primordiality of *actually dissociated experiences*, I can certainly be mistaken. There may be thousands of reasons and further *distinctions* which, if taken into account, could force me to consider *X* and *Y* as different entities. In the extreme forms of empiricism, the mere fact of appearing in two different *actualities* can be taken as the justification of genuine difference.

At some point, the *distinctions* terminate and this is what founds the identity of the *actual thing*.<sup>165</sup> If I take at first moment the person entering the room to be my friend Yngve, then this is the current limit of *distinctions*. In the next moment I may realise that the two are, in fact, different, that it is not Yngve but Xavier, but to see this, I have to bring in more *distinctions* – I have to see his face more precisely, see some of his movements which are totally un-Yngve-like, etc. Yet, even then, the *experience* of the same, the first impression which confused the two (that is, which did not distinguish Xavier/Yngve), remains valid, it has revealed something which it was actually possible not to *distinguish*.<sup>228</sup>

*Identity is an actual limit of distinctions.*

It is a point beyond which no more *distinctions* are made, or rather, a boundary within which no more *distinctions* are made.<sup>229</sup>

At which moment does the Theseus' ship cease to be itself and becomes a new ship? At none, because it has never been 'itself', it has never been any metaphysical (or ontological) 'substance' with intrinsic, self-identical 'essence'. It was the limit of *distinctions* which it was purposeful to

<sup>228</sup>As usual, we are not talking about the attentively reflective activity which starts with the ready *dissociated objects* and inquires only into the relations between or possible abstractions from them. Such an activity, in a pure form, is itself an abstraction which never obtains without being involved in more fundamental processes which we are describing. It is, by the way, a good example of the *dissociative result of reflection*. In the moment I realise that it was Xavier, Xavier becomes *the object of reflection* and thus also *the objective aspect* of the prior Xavier/Yngve situation. It becomes opposed to the *subjective impression* of this having *only seemed* to be Yngve. Xavier/Yngve seems to disappear although it withdraws behind the curtain giving place to the *objective* and the *subjective aspect* of the *actual reflection*.

<sup>229</sup>Almost identical formulation reads: "For in general those things that do not admit of division are called one in so far as they do not admit of it;" [Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. V:6] But the following examples suggest a different, weaker meaning: "e.g., if two things are indistinguishable *qua* man, they are one kind of man; if *qua* animal, one kind of animal; if *qua* magnitude, one kind of magnitude." Two things can hardly be indistinguishable *qua* man, or *qua* animal, but distinguishable in other respect. The intention that two men can be, say, equally good and hence both be one kind of man, namely, a good man, has re-surfaced recently as relative identity and we will return to it in §169.

terminate at this point, at the point at which we said “This is a ship”, or perhaps even “This is *this* ship”. Replacing the planks, we begin introducing further *distinctions* which suspend – in any case, can suspend – the validity of the previous final boundary of *distinguishing*. Its supposed ‘essence’ was nothing but such a boundary. But assuming that it is something positive, something which constitutes thing’s identical ‘being in itself’, we can not avoid being perplexed by this ingenious puzzle.

166. An aspect of the crystalisation of *object*’s independent subsistence and identity, that is, of objective time, is an experience of change, of one and the same *object* having earlier been so-and-so, but now being otherwise. This might seem to contradict the claim that identity is but a limit of *distinctions* since change implies additional *distinctions* which should differentiate the object before and after the change. It does not, however, contradict the claim but only shows the relative arbitrariness of what counts as identity. For all practical purposes a river is a river, one and the same river. And it remains one also after the observation that “[o]n those who enter the same rivers, ever different waters flow”<sup>230</sup> pushes the limit of *distinctions* beyond that used for the ordinary purposes. In principle, every issue can be dissolved (one might be tempted to say today: deconstructed) into interminable series of aspects, views, perspectives and possibilities, every situation can be discussed *ad infinitum* without ever reaching any bottom, every object can be divided and gradually dissolved into finer and finer distinctions. But this is so only in principle, that is, in abstract terms of *actual dissociations*. In practice, that is, in the only context of relevance, it is not quite so. The fact that a house can be deconstructed does not prove its unreality; and even if later generation will build different houses in very different ways from ours, does not prove that we are building wrong and unreal houses. Even if *actual truths* change over time, at each particular time they are given in quite a stable fashion, in fact, sufficiently stable for people of similar interests and levels of intelligence to be constrained in their formulations in approximately the same ways. Objects, issues and situations arise relatively to those who participate in them and, in particular, relatively to their ability (which is not under voluntary control) to terminate the *distinctions* at some specific points. But relativity means neither subjectivity nor lack of any objective counterpart.

Identity is established as the limit of *distinctions*; as some *actual*, not absolute limit – beyond these, more *distinctions* may be possible and actually take place. In most cases, these further *distinctions* will be considered mere ‘accidents’ of the identical ‘substance’, but in the extreme cases they may lead to the puzzles like that of Theseus’ ship. I cut a branch from a tree; then I cut another; then yet another; when I am finished with all the branches, I begin to cut, piece by piece, the trunk, from the top to the bottom. I end up with a heap of wood, but at what point does the tree cease to exist? This is arbitrary, that is, dependent on the *distinctions* dictated by the circumstances. If I left a part of the trunk standing, even if dead, one might say that *this* is the same tree which stood here yesterday – only dead and without branches. And since what is relevant here might be the fact of something standing at this particular place, we do not focus on the change which occurred, the *distinction* that the trunk does not have all the branches the tree had, is ignored. If, however, the tree was the favorite one on which children used to climb and play, then *this* tree has actually *ceased to exist* – it is no more, and what is left is not the same.

Does it mean that, to begin with, there were two trees and one survived cutting off the branches while the other did not. Certainly, there were different trees for people who considered it only as something standing there and for the kids climbing it. But this question of Chrysippus concerns the ‘objective’ state of affairs: are there two trees or not? And if there are two which one survives? Since we do not subscribe to any ‘objective substances’ existing ‘out there’ no matter what or who is around, we should be allowed to claim that it still depends on who is looking at the matter. If somebody must reach some absolute compromise, let him say that there is a sense in which there is only one tree which survived the process, namely, the tree identified as the limit of *distinctions* remaining at the end. He should not, however, try to convince the kids about it. Another problem with it is that one can remove something more from this rest and ask the question again. One won’t find any ‘essence’ but will end up postulating a residual point of self-identity. In our view, it is not only uninteresting but directly inadmissible. The answer to the question about Theseus’ ship has an aura of arbitrariness which has always threatened ‘substantialism’. For it represents an antinomy arising from the insistence on a yes-no answer to a question which does not have one, an antinomy of applying the immediate category of self-identity at the level of *actuality*, of

---

<sup>230</sup>Heraclitus DK 22B12

attempting to view a temporal object ‘as if’ it were timeless, precisely delineated ‘being in itself’, self-identical ‘substance’.

Before refining the thesis from §165, let us comment on its relation to some alternatives which might seem possible.

### Indiscernibility and relativity

Identity of a thing is always only relative to the drawn *distinctions* – consciously or not, intentionally or not, *actually* or not... It is thus relative to the involved existences. Does this mean, as also the claim in §165 might suggest, that we are simply stating identity of indiscernibles? Not exactly, but the difference may be rather subtle. 167.

First, the principle itself is an ingenious and more precise variant of the dictum: “plurality must not be posited without necessity.”<sup>231</sup> Its objective is to attune our understanding of identities to their metaphysical realm, to bring epistemological distinctions into agreement with the ontological ‘facts’. Viewed (perhaps with some degree of bad will) as such a project, the principle is quite different from our view according to which identity is not recovered but constituted as the limit of *distinctions*. Identity is not any metaphysical, supra-human quality of things. It is a purely pragmatic (albeit not voluntary) notion of fixing the limits of *distinctions* at relevant points. What makes it relevant is not given by any laws, but by the context. Identity of indiscernibles is indeed a good rough expression – do not *distinguish* what need not be *distinguished*. But since we do not have any ‘substances’, any ‘essential’ nor ‘accidental’ properties, a process which has been thus terminated at some point, at some identity, can always, at least in principle, be carried further, for it never reaches any ‘metaphysical identity’.<sup>232</sup> Returning home every day I do not wonder if the sofa standing there now is *really the same* as the one from yesterday, and if I do I should visit some specialist. It is the same because there is not the slightest reason, in fact, not any possibility to distinguish the two. It is only the assumption of some ‘substances in themselves’ which could make one wonder how to prove that nobody in the meantime entered my flat and exchanged my sofa for another but ‘identical’ one.<sup>233</sup>

A more extreme exposition might be read into the principle which also might seem to make it 168. identical to the above claim from §165. Its variant often plays a crucial role when one tries to attune knowledge to ‘facts’ by actually *getting rid of* all transcendence and pretending that one is in the possession of a complete logical language, fitting perfectly the external world. It underlies equally the attempts to reduce all truth to mere language (“Whatever we cannot speak about, we should keep silent about”), or even all reality (“Reality is the names we give to it”).<sup>234</sup> Most abstractly, it amounts to reducing identity to the *actually discernible* criteria of identity.

The problem with this, like with most other principles, is to determine the ways and limits of its application. The crucial question concerns what is allowed as grounds for discernibility. What counts as the properties to be considered when deciding indiscernibility? One will use *actual* observations but, of course, not exactly, because no two observations, made at different points of time, are exactly the same. If we include even time, then we are left with pure *immediacies*, as *dissociated* from each other as the monads themselves. If we allow difference in time, then the question arises: how do we determine that the two appearances have the same – that is, identical – value of all the relevant properties? In particular, among all properties there is the property of ‘being equal to *a*’ and so such a definition is circular.<sup>235</sup> So Leibniz wanted to limit

<sup>231</sup>E.g. W. Ockham, *Quodlibeta V*:q.1;p.97, *Ordinatio sive Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum I*:Prologue 1.3 [after R. Heinzmann, ed., *The Medieval Philosophy*. p.242] Earlier variants figure, for instance, in Plato, *Parmenides*; Aristotle, *Physics* I:187b.10; J. Duns Scotus, *A Treatise on God as First Principle*

<sup>232</sup>These remarks do not apply to *existence* which, being a limit of *distinguishability*, is also the site of ultimate unity.

<sup>233</sup>The two are indiscernible not only because I can not discern any difference although I might suspect some to be there. Sitting there and thinking: ‘The two are identical, I cannot possibly discern them *but* they still might be distinct!’ – such a suspicion is already a discrimination. Hopefully, it may be later refuted (with the help of a specialist?) and I can again start seeing the ‘two’ as one and the same. But the very suspicion is already a *distinction dissociating the actuality* of the sofa today from its *actuality* yesterday.

<sup>234</sup>Plausibility of such statements depends almost solely on the intended meaning of “we”, and then of “I”. Recall the ambiguities of objectivity-subjectivity from section 1.4.4.vii, in particular, §136.

<sup>235</sup>Recently, B. Brody, *Identity and Essence*, argued that such a definition is only impredicative and not viciously circular, but we leave it to the concept analysts to decide if such fine distinctions do us any service.

the principle to ‘substances’ and comparisons to the values of their properties, others started to distinguish intrinsic and extrinsic, pure and impure properties, the linguistic bias would like to include everything – and only! – that can be expressed in (a particular) language, etc., etc.

In a sense, but only in a sense, our philosophy of *distinctions* and *distinguishing* goes along with the principle: whatever is not *distinguished*, remains one and the same. The difference lies in that we take *distinction* as the primitive notion. It comprises much more than any *actual* differences, whether of linguistic, mental, physical or whatever character. *Distinctions* need not have any mental character: most *distinctions*, even though relative to *me*, or rather to a form of existence, are not made by *me* (nor you), they are just encountered and their limits are *actual objects*. The relative, yet *transcendent* character of many *distinctions* sets us apart from any understanding of the principle which usually appeals to empiricism by reducing the discernibility to the *actually observable distinctions*.

Moreover, there is no designated set of *distinctions* which, necessarily and sufficiently, determine identity. In one context color, material, origin... may count, in another none of those may be relevant. Two identical, but numerically distinct, ships can be legitimately considered the same by a captain who needs only one for the travel and views both equally fit for it. (For him, the situation is entirely the same as it would be with only one ship present). Claiming, on the other hand, that every possible distinction is relevant makes the two immediately distinct. Our point concerning the relativity is that there is no metaphysical set of criteria which could be used in every context for determining identity or discernibility. There is no meta-level for the *distinctions* which could provide such criteria – there are only sub-levels of more and more specific classes of *distinctions*. Eventually, *actual* things are but limits of *distinctions*. As there is no meta-level for the determination of such limits, this actually suggests the fundamental and primitive, that is preceding any criteria, character of identity.

There are two aspects of identity which, usually, determine two opposite camps (perhaps, of Fregeans and Quineans, respectively): either identity is a primitive notion, irreducible to others, or else it is in fact reducible to some criteria. The latter comes in many variations, namely, variations over identity of indiscernibles. We agree with it in so far as identity is a limit of *distinctions*. In this sense, it is relative not only to a distinguishing existence but also to the distinctions taken into account. A thing is, after all, just the other side of the totality of all it excludes, it is, so to speak, the ‘complement of its outside’, 1.1.2. However, the border between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, the mere *fact* of it being drawn at all, is not determined by any universal criteria. It is a *limit of distinctions* and as such a primitive event (usually, not an act), for drawing a limit is not reducible to merely drawing the *distinctions*. In this sense, identity is not merely a conceptual device for simplifying thought, as Avenarius or Mach would have it. It is an *a priori* condition of thought, a reflection of the limitedness of *actuality*, which can not be reduced not only to any *actual* criteria, but not even to any other notions. It is not an accident of reflective thought but its very presupposition, an inseparable accomplice of *actual distinctions*.

169. What certainly does not apply is the opposite principle – indiscernibility of identicals. Two different trees, the one with all branches and the one (the same!) with two branches cut off *may* be considered the same, and so *may* be Theseus’ ship before and after renovation. We fix identity at some point and having fixed it, grave reasons may be needed to change it. In most common cases, this fixation is merely a result of unconscious process, even of bodily functions, of perception, sensation or, as it may be, of pre-reflective *distinctions*, perhaps, drawn in the early stages of experience.

There is a yet more specific variant of the principle which also tries to negate indiscernibility of identicals, or rather, limit the scope of its legitimacy. One says sometimes that identity is not an absolute notion, but something which is relative – *X* and *Y* may be identical only ‘with respect to’ some *Z*.<sup>236</sup> Unlike in our case, here *Z* is not any existence but some other element of objective

---

<sup>236</sup>Recalling first footnote 229, here we can observe that already Hobbes presents this as a solution to the problems of identity. “But we must first consider by what name anything is called, when we inquire concerning the *identity* of it. For it is one thing to ask concerning Socrates, whether he be the same man, and another to ask whether he be the same body; for his body, when he is old, cannot be the same it was when he was an infant, by reason of difference in magnitude; yet nevertheless he may be the same man.” [T. Hobbes, *De Corpore*. II:11.7.] Notice, that “name” here denotes only the aspect ‘with respect to’ which identity is established – it is not the sign which merely *represents* the identity.

This may have different emphasis but reminds also of the ‘indifferent-realism’ at which William of Champeaux

and already differentiated reality. The old and the new ships are identical with respect to their function, their owner, their legal status, etc., but not with respect to the material from which they are made. Sounds reasonable. ‘With respect to...’ is but a way of pointing to some dimension along which no further *distinctions* have been made. However, if we asked about what exactly constitutes the identity along this particular dimension, we would probably run into the similar, if not entirely the same problems as the traditional notion.

This eventual reliance on the absolute identity (observed also in C. McGinn, *Logical Properties*), is reflected in the formulations of relative identity which tend to involve absolutely distinct or identical objects. Thus young and old Oscar are claimed to be the same dog but distinct – absolutely distinct – things, or as one says, logical objects. The status of logical objects remains a bit unclear, though they seem to be very similar to the limits of *distinctions* – viewed not as *actual* such limits, but as the further indistinguishable residual points.<sup>237</sup> *Distinctions* which can influence identity need not have any mental or linguistic character. The logical objects, on the other hand, remind about mentally conditioned limits of distinctions which are relative to the expressive power of the applied language. But one is anxious to emphasize that it is not what they are. On the contrary, they are rather like the ‘substances’ with their independent, absolutely distinct, being. They are not only further undistinguished but indistinguishable. The need for such reservations arises from identifying (in often technical ways) distinguishability with the expressive power of a language. Hence to escape relativity to the language, one must endow the ideal entities with their own being. Thus a dog Oscar and the same dog, only thought without one hair, are the same dogs but distinct – absolutely distinct – logical objects.<sup>238</sup>

The logical objects seem indispensable for the ‘relative identity theory’ to be itself. Without them it would be hard to distinguish it from the identity of indiscernibles, for then identity of two objects could amount only to the objects being the same *Z* for every possible *Z*. But as long as such ‘absolutely identical logical objects’ and the identity along the designated dimension remain, the theory may, perhaps, account for much of the common-sense usage of the *term and statements* of identity, but it does not seem to offer any significant account of identity as such – it only presses the question one step further. It helps little to summon the *proper* form of an identity statement as only ‘*X* is the same *F* as *Y*’, when the statements which we, in fact, make of the form ‘*X* is the same as *Y*’ make perfect sense (e.g., in mathematics, about people, about ‘Morning Star’ and ‘Evening Star’). Besides, admitting logical objects, there seems to be no difference between the statement “*X* is the same logical object as *Y*”, “*X* is absolutely the same as *Y*” and simply “*X* is the same as *Y*”. (Although in many cases of the statements of identity of things we might agree with one or another variant of the relative identity statements, we take the qualification “one or another” quite seriously. For any set of criteria one can produce a counter-example forcing an adjustment of any specific theory in one or another way.)

Identity (at least identity of *actual* things) is a completely relative notion, it is not any metaphysical absolute but an accident of an existence which terminates *distinctions* at this, rather than

---

arrived under the critique from Abelard. Peter and Paul are said to be ‘indifferently’ men or possess humanity *secundum indifferentiam* in that they are equally rational, mortal, etc. But they are still two distinct men. The question how they can be two different men if, *qua* men, they are (indifferently) the same was hard enough to drive master William out of this position.

<sup>237</sup>“Indistinguishable” is used not for mutual indiscernibility of *a* and *b* but for the absence of further differentiation of a given limit *a*.

<sup>238</sup>The absolute identity appears in a similar disguise in the attempt to handle the Hobbes’ variant of the Theseus’ ship problem. Here not only the old ship *O* gets replaced all the planks (becoming, perhaps a new ship, *N*) but also, at the same time, an identical copy *N*<sub>2</sub> of the old ship *O* is built from the planks removed from *O*. Both *N*<sub>1</sub> and *N*<sub>2</sub> seem to have equal claims to be the same as the original *O* but this, admitting transitivity of equality, would make also *N*<sub>1</sub> = *N*<sub>2</sub>. So one tries to avoid identification *N*<sub>1</sub> = *O* by postulating identity of *X* and *Y* with respect to *Z* if both *X* and *Y* differ from *Z* by at most one single part (or 5, or 20 parts). Assuming that one knows what a part is (a part of a part of *X* is probably a part of *X*, but is an atom of a part of *X* also a part of *X*? Merologists may discuss), what is the *Z* in this equation? Trying to break the transitivity of identity across gradual replacement of the planks, *Z* appears as an ideal measure – an ideal, perhaps the original ship *O* retained in the memory – against which other instances are measured. It is thus only the absolute identity of *Z* and a sufficient proximity, similarity to it which make up the whole. If this sounds plausible, let us imagine two (physically and completely) distinct things, *T*<sub>1</sub> ≠ *T*<sub>2</sub>, each composed of two parts *T*<sub>1</sub> = *P*<sub>1</sub><sub>T</sub><sub>1</sub> + *P*<sub>2</sub><sub>T</sub><sub>1</sub> and *T*<sub>2</sub> = *P*<sub>1</sub><sub>T</sub><sub>2</sub> + *P*<sub>2</sub><sub>T</sub><sub>2</sub>, such that for both *i* ∈ {1, 2} : *P*<sub>*i*</sub><sub>*T*<sub>1</sub></sub> can be replaced with *P*<sub>*i*</sub><sub>*T*<sub>2</sub></sub>. Using *P*<sub>1</sub><sub>*T*<sub>2</sub></sub> + *P*<sub>2</sub><sub>*T*<sub>1</sub></sub> as the comparator *Z* we then obtain

$$T_1 = P_{1T_1} + P_{2T_1} = P_{1T_2} + P_{2T_1} = P_{1T_2} + P_{2T_2} = T_2$$

which does not look particularly plausible. One may keep adjusting the formulations and multiply the special side-conditions, but we will stop here.

that boundary. The only candidate to some metaphysical pretensions might be *the fact* of terminating distinctions in such a way, the primitive and irreducible (even though relative) character of such limits. In any case, no universally valid criteria of identity are to be expected.

170. A final word on the issue of relativity of identity. According to §165, what is identical for me need not be for you, what I confuse as one and the same thing, you may be able to differentiate as two.

Emphasizing relativity of identity to *existence*, we should keep in mind that this is very different from saying that these *existences* have some determining or constitutive power over identities. Identities, like *distinctions*, are for the most *found* and not created (produced, posited, generated, projected) by the *existence*. Relativity need not have anything to do with ‘subjectivity’, for being found it retains the element of being *founded*, which disappears only in the most *dissociated experiences*.

Furthermore, saying “relative to *existence*”, we often (and in the current context almost constantly) mean relativity to a *form of existence*. Nobody decides what he wants to be identical and, moreover, what appears so will typically appear so to most (if not all) *existences* of the same form – some things are equally identical to many. We will all agree on the identity of this table here, or that tree over there. Just as there are pragmatic, and this involves also natural, reasons for drawing some *distinctions*, there are similar reasons for terminating them. The sensuous apparatus of humans will, under normal circumstances, deem some things identical almost irrespectively of who *actually* is involved in the situation. But as the concerned contents become more *vague*, less prone to the narrow look of *actuality*, the differences may become more significant. Is the feeling of joy I have now, the same as the one I had yesterday? Is the love I experience the same as that experienced by the one I love? Is the city in which I live the same city in which my neighbour lives? Wait! Here it is obviously the same city. Well, yes, but what constitutes its identity? Where does it end and where does it begin? I always counted this particular suburb as a part of the city, while for my neighbour it was already outside. As with the *distinctions* in general, the city does not have any ‘essence’, any sharp boundary, although it seems to have some kernel, something which makes it *this* city. All people may agree on the presence of such a kernel without, however, agreeing on the precise boundaries – they all may terminate the *distinctions* at slightly different points. “There are no sharp divisions in reality.”<sup>239</sup> Thus, although talking about the same city, they will experience and associate with it slightly different ‘essences’.

171. This pragmatic relativity of identity is about as far as the possible analogy with the ‘relative identity theory’, as well as Locke and empiricism in general, goes. For we have no atoms, no logical objects, no basic ‘ideas’, ‘perceptions’, ‘impressions’, nor ‘substances’. We do not share the dream to differentiate everything which can possibly be differentiated and then, having thus obtained the ‘absolute atoms’, to reconstruct the reality from them.

Ireno Funes, the hero of a short story by Borges about perfect memory and insomnia, would be a dream-hero of empiricism, nominalism and, so it seems, of the relative identity. “Not only was it difficult for him to see that the generic symbol ‘dog’ took in all the dissimilar individuals of all shapes and sizes, it irritated him that the ‘dog’ of three-fourteen in the afternoon, seen in profile, should be indicated by the same noun as the dog of three-fifteen, seen frontally. [...] He was the solitary, lucid spectator of a multiform, momentaneous, and almost unbearably precise world.”<sup>240</sup> The perfect *precision* of minute distinctions does not disclose any eventual atoms but, on the contrary, dissolves all identities. The search for such atoms, for the most minute, ultimately self-identical elements can always be carried on further. It stops, from the point of view of metaphysics of principles and sufficient reasons, at a completely arbitrary point; it stops at some point only because for one reason or another, typically unconscious, sometimes confused, but usually a good reason of avoiding ‘unbearable precision’, we stop to *distinguish*. “My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things.”<sup>241</sup> Just like the ability to handle wide variety of distinctions tells us something about one’s intelligence, the points at which one stops distinctions and rests satisfied

<sup>239</sup>S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*.

<sup>240</sup>J. L. Borges, *Funes, his Memory*.

<sup>241</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. 344. Another and more existential expression of the search for ultimate foundation and despair over its eternal invisibility is decadent boredom trying to entertain itself with the aesthetic vissitudes. Count des Esseintes in J.-K. Huysmans, *A Rebours* is a good example, trying to fill the bottomless emptiness with more and more subtle distinctions which only deepen the sense of emptiness. The distinctions of advertisement industry and ever new fashions, artificial needs craving only for mere novelties, reflect on the social scale the despair over the lack of substance.

tell us something about what kind of person one is. “What people accept as a justification – shews how they think and live.”<sup>242</sup>

\* \* \*

Returning to the thesis from §165, identity presents a mysterious problem for reflection but only as far as time is concerned. One may wonder “How do I know that this cup today and the one yesterday are the same?”, not “How do I know that this cup here is the same?” nor “How do I know that this cup here and the one over there are (not) the same?” Since time and space are but *equipollent aspects* arising from *spatio-temporality*, a brief comment might be in place.

If you see a building so high that you can not simultaneously see both its top and its bottom, you do not wonder. Perhaps you should? If you can never see it in its totality (say, it is surrounded by other buildings which make it impossible to see it whole from a distance), if you can never perceive it in a unity of one act, isn’t the problem the same as with the same cup today and yesterday? Recalling one of the multiple senses of unity listed by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, V:6, one will immediately point to the possibility of a continuous perception of the whole building from top to bottom; the continuity which does not obtain with the cup yesterday and today. Let us first refine the claim §165:

*Identity is a limit of distinctions represented by a sign, that is, contrived to the actuality of a single act.*

This sign will be, typically, an abstract sign, not merely an aspect of the thing, but, for instance, a word which can be made fully *actual* even though the thing itself can not. It is not the *sign* which establishes identity – it only represents it. It represents the *actual* limit of *distinctions* within the *horizon of actuality*. This horizon sets the limit on the possible experiences of identity – identity is always an *experience* consummated fully within this horizon where the *non-actual* aspects of ‘the identical’ appear through the *sign*.

The continuous perception of the building, although traversing a region of space, is important because it does not create any ‘gaps’ in time. For the *actual reflection* this continuity amounts to the unbroken presence of the sign and (aspects of) its perceptual correlate. You see the different stories of the building but the *sign*, ‘this building’, is kept continuously (even if not *reflectively*) as your sight moves along the walls. Space, in any case its region which is accessible to the observation, is exactly the field where such a perceptual continuity is possible. In the moment a break occurs, when you enter a shop and go out again or turn around, the break of continuity is still a temporal break – just as when you close your eyes, the building disappears from your sight *for some time*. After such a break you still see the same building – there is simply not the slightest reason, in fact, not the slightest possibility of imagining the two to be different.

The continuity of space (not the *objective*, but experiential space) has the same character of endowing the continuous region with identity; any ‘break’ represents a *distinction* separating one thing from another. We could say, just as the perceptual field is the scope of simultaneity, so the possibility of continuous perception is circumscribed as the ideal limit of simultaneity of *distinct* things in space. The identity of things seen only in their spatial, simultaneous dimension is unproblematic – it is the self-identity of *immediately* given *distinctions* and their limits. The ‘gaps’ in space are the *distinctions* we recognise as separating different things. The ‘gaps’ in time have another import – they reflect only the *dissociation* of experience into *actualities*. As long as we can maintain the continuity across time, the identity of a given object might remain as unproblematic as in its spatial *immediacy*. The problem for *reflection* is that such a continuity does not, in general, obtain for things which it would like to consider the same. The continuity between the cup yesterday and today is broken. And *vice versa*, whenever such an ontic continuity is broken, it involves time. Trivially: time is the dimension along which things may cease to be the same. And a bit less trivially: identity is *the means* reflection employs to keep them the same across *dissociated actualities*. The question whether my sofa today is really the same as the one yesterday is asking about the reasons I might find to conclude they are not. “The reasons I might have” means simply the *distinctions* it might be possible to draw between the two. There are none (none of relevance, at least), and the sofa *here-and-now* remains connected to (the same as) the

<sup>242</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:325. A good philosopher says only what he *can* say – and keeps silent. Others keep analysing, distinguishing, refining, repeating and ... filling wastebaskets.

sofa which has receded into the past *actuality* of yesterday – this ‘gap’ in time has been covered up.

173. Thus, identity is a truly *transcendent* relation when viewed exclusively from the perspective of mere *actuality* – it represents a noumenal *x* which lies beyond every *actual* appearance. Some such *x*’s can arise as results of *reflective construction*. But most common and natural ones precede it and are solidified as limits of *distinctions* prior to conscious, let alone attentive efforts. In either case, the *experience dissociated* into separate *actualities*, temporality split into a mere succession of ‘nows’, call for an account of the experienced continuity.

*Identity is a reflection – yeah, representation – of the experienced continuity; it is the trace which, ‘filling the gaps’ of objective time, makes up for its broken continuity which is no longer actually experienced through the dissociated nows.*

Actual identity, the ‘repetition as recurrence’, the equality of *a* and *b*, is an aspect of conscious experience which lives time through *actualities*. But it becomes *a problem for reflection* which, taking its *concepts* from the assumed obviousness of *immediacy*, tries to account by their means for the *unity* which *transcends* every *actuality*. The identity of *objects*, things and ideas is, indeed, a very fragile aspect of their experience. Just like analysis can dissolve every issue, it can likewise dissolve every identity, it can make *reflection* disregard it as ‘unreal’ because not given *objectively*. And from the threat of ‘unreality’ there emerge ghosts of ‘ideal’ entities – ideal *x* of which *a* and *b* are only different appearances and whose recurring appearances could be, in principle, repeated *ad infinitum*. We have earlier seen universals which could be viewed from exactly the same angle: accounting for the recurring repetitions of the same *x*. Ideal limits, like regulative ideas, *posited* in the unthinkable infinity of time, try functioning as the norms or else the ultimate witnesses to the absolute truth which will be disclosed only in the eventual fullness of times. Of course, idealities deserve to be dissolved, but the crucial difference is whether an ideal is merely *posited*, or whether it is also *reflecting* some deeper reality. A total dissolution of everything which stretches beyond the limits of ever narrower *immediacy* is only the ultimate expression of the *objectivistic illusion*, of the thirst for the ‘givens’, and the despair over their absence. A dissolved self cannot avoid dissolving the encountered things though this disease, like many others, bears the seeds of a possible revival.

174. **3. Totality of visibles:**  $a_1 + a_2 + a_3 + \dots = x$

Consideration of equality, of identity at the level of *actuality*, took some space because it is where it belongs. Equality binds *dissociated actualities* together. It appears always (unless reduced to the empty *x* = *x* of a given *object*, of an *immediate reflection that it is*) as a *transcendent* relation, stretching beyond the *actualities* scattered across different points of time and bringing them together. But it *can do* it, and it is *needed* to do it, only because our being is not exhausted by the *dissociated actualities* but has itself *unity* which *transcends* every *actuality*.

Identity may be an *object* of an experience, as happens every time one realises that *a* is *the same as b*. This, inadvertently, requires both *a* and *b* to be themselves *actual*, or in any case thought as such. Thus, every statement of identity requires, or as the case may be reduces, its object to be at the level of *actuality*. There are however cases when such a reduction is hard, if at all possible to imagine. What about the infatuation which I felt a week ago and I am still feeling? Is it the same or not? It is the same, it concerns the same person, it has some continuity. But a week ago it had a slightly different flavour, I did not then see this person to have something of vanity in herself, while I see it now. But it is still the same because... Because I re-cognise the feeling and give it a name? The tendency to consider it the same is stronger than that, but only as long as it retains enough of the similarity. With time it may simply – and continuously! – change, perhaps even into disgust, pity, repulsion. Then one may find as many reasons to call it the same as reasons to call it different. It is the same infatuation turned into repulsion, the same fascination turned into boredom. Or was it, perhaps, from the start repulsion disguised as infatuation, boredom disguised as fascination? Whether the same or different, it does not matter because what matters in this case is what one is feeling and thinking, perhaps, also what one felt and thought before, but not if this thought or feeling now is equal to some other.

175. The limiting case of *non-actualities* which, nevertheless, seem to require an answer to the question about their identity is that of a person and the world. The former was treated in 1.3.3 and 1.4.4, so here we only comment briefly on the latter. But everything said about the *totality* of the world

applies equally to personal identity viewed from the level of mineness.

Complexes are reflectively dissociated into, or reflectively built from, their ‘constituent parts’. Most thinking goes for construction of such complexes where, as Pierce says, “unity is nothing but consistency.”<sup>243</sup> Sure, a complex may be a mere gathering of unrelated parts, like a ‘composite substance’, a heap of stones, but it is usually some sense of aim and purpose, or just consistency, which makes us consider this rather than that as a complex, as a well-connected complex of parts, a table, a car, a heap of stones... We certainly won’t attempt to improve on Pierce’s consistency trying to determine in what it possibly might consist. We won’t because the possibilities may be innumerable.

Although reflection would like to arrange everything as a complex, a complex of complexes, etc., in some cases the principle of organisation may be completely unclear. One takes then often refuge to a posited limit – applying some principle to the actual elements beyond the limit of actual possibility, one claims to obtain some ideal limit. Quoting the limit construction one may easily happen to be very proud from the analogy to the converging series in mathematical analysis. Unfortunately, the image of countability and convergence is presupposed by all such limit ‘constructions’ in philosophy. But this means that constructions do not generate anything but only utilise the assumption of a prior unity. All such limits, regulative ideas, posited ideals are but attempts to regain the primordial unity in which they are founded and without which they could not even be imagined.<sup>244</sup> They yield totalities which, at best, are only reflected by the respective limit constructions. A totality is but a gathering of its parts, is one only because the parts have been posited as a collection and are considered as one. Totalities are not perfect unities but only “illuminations of combinations”<sup>245</sup> or, to put it directly, just heaps of stones. This is in fact as much as actual thinking is capable of making out of the world, or personal identity – the sum total, the totality of its visible elements. Whether it should be called empiricism or pantheism depends only on how much divine character is ascribed to the totality of the world.

Saying “external world” one usually identifies it with externality of objects. How do we think, 176. what do we mean by “the external world”? Easy, look at this table in front of you – obviously, it is ‘there’, it is objective, external. The ‘external world’ is just the totality of such external things. This is how much we are able to make out of the assumed ‘concept’ of externality.

But, do you remember the objectivistic illusion (I:5.2.2)? What totality? There is no totality of all things, there are just external objects, plenty of them, but that’s it. And certainly, the totality of all things is inaccessible. It is never experienced, never given, nothing like that ever confronts us in any actual experience; there is no totality of things; things, objects do not sum up to anything, least of all to any world. At best, this world appears as an ideal, that is, impossible and inaccessible limit.

The meaning of asymmetry of Being (I:6.3.3.i) is that lower things never sum up to give something higher – higher level is inaccessible in the categories of the lower ones. Above the totality of objects, there is the unity, we might say, of the world, or perhaps, of the horizon of experience, which precedes experiences of individual objects; the unity of which the posited totality is but an imperfect sign. Bracketing this unity, this aspect of all experiences, and then trying to account for the ‘external world’ or, perhaps, for its ‘externality’, one ends up accounting for the externality of an object, while trying to account for ‘the world’, one ends up accounting for nothing but only positing the ideal totality of things.

Externality of objects is, unlike the ‘externality of the world’, an experience. A thing, an object is not just external – it is experienced as such. Things are independent, external and, at the same time, experienced. To be independent and external, they do not have to be inaccessible – they are objective in virtue of the very relativity to our experiences.

But ‘the world’, the ‘external world’? By its very nature, it is impossible to have an experience of it – as a totality, it always extends beyond any actual experience. So, perhaps, every experience

<sup>243</sup>C. S. Pierce, *Some consequences of four incapacities*. p.71 [We will give the word “unity” a different meaning, but for the moment let us keep it this way.]

<sup>244</sup>This does not mean that various different ideal limits so posited are concretely founded in various particular unities. There is only one unity, and the totality founded in it has two respective aspects: of myself and of the world. But any particular limit is always posited under some principle which is merely applied to the already assumed totality. The idea of totality is founded in the unity, the principle so applied – furnishing the assumed consistency to the totality – may be almost anything one can imagine.

<sup>245</sup>Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §64

is only a partial experience of the world? Perhaps... But it would seem that a partial experience of *X* is not an experience of *X* but of its part, and if one insists on it being a part of *X*, then *X* must come from elsewhere. Every *actual experience* is an experience of its object or situation, but not of the world. And yet, the world, the ‘objective world’ stays in the background, the ‘unified world’ haunts every actuality and is experienced underneath every particular experience...

177. **Invisible unity:** •

As we said in 1.3.2, the ‘wholeness’ of the world is not constituted in terms of *actualities*. We feel compelled to accept it as a *totality* (and this always means, *one totality*) because, lack of any unifying principle notwithstanding, its *unity* is experienced as another pole of the *unity of myself*. We would not get the idea of an absolute *totality* of the whole world (nor of ourselves), if no *unity* were experienced prior to it. “Every whole composed of parts participates in a unity preceding these parts.”<sup>246</sup> Every whole participates in the *unity* which *founds* its ‘wholeness’.

But we have not seen any *unity*. So far, it might rather seem like there is nothing ‘really’ identical, nothing possessing *absolute unity* which is not merely relative to our ability to make, and suspend, *distinctions*. Is all that remains only “a permanently tentative look?”<sup>247</sup> Indeed, every *visible* determination of anything *invisible* is by its very nature only tentative and approximate. So, is life a story in a search – and that implicitly means, constantly failed search – of a narrator?<sup>248</sup> But “thou wouldst not seek, if thou hadst not found.”<sup>249</sup>

We definitely distinguish the question about the identity of the dog Oscar before and after the loss of one of its hairs or, for that matter, about the identity of my friend Paul before and after the accident which made him lame and, on the other hand, the ship of Theseus being the same before and after exchange of all the planks. The problem of the possibility of knowing particulars amounts indeed to the identity of indiscernibles. I can point at this cup but all I know about it, except for its being *actually* given here, is the same as what I know of the indiscernible cup standing in the cupboard. Which of the two is here is entirely uninteresting and healthy *reflection* will never (in normal situations) worry about such identities. The situation is entirely different with human beings. I not only can point at Paul sitting next to me; I actually know him, and knowing him is something infinitely more than knowing his ‘human essence’, than knowing him as being a man *simpliciter*. Knowing Paul is as different from knowing Peter, as Paul is different from Peter, and they are infinitely different (even though they are twins). On the other hand, knowing one cup is exactly the same as knowing another, though indiscernible, one. We know individuals (that is, *existing* individuals, not merely particulars) because they are not only limits of *distinctions* which always can be refined further, but because they never can be. To know a person transcends by far not only simple *conceptual* constructions but also deepest psychological insights, for it amounts to a *recognition*, beyond the character traits and psychological features, of the unrepeatable uniqueness of this person – not as an abstract property but as the most *concrete* truth of fact. In short, we distinguish between the *unity of existence* and a mere identity of *actual* things. *Totality* is an intermediate notion which arises whenever the desired ‘principle of unity’, establishing the whole of *actualities*, can not be seen.

*Self* is the *confrontation* with the *one*, and its *unity* is but the uniqueness of this *confrontation*.<sup>250</sup> Each *birth* creates a new, unique individual. At first it is only a *virtual* kernel from which this individual will eventually develop in all *actual* manifestations. It does not contain any ‘complete notion’, it does not contain all the future and past ‘contingencies’ which this individual may encounter in life, and which might be needed if the unity of a substance were constituted by its concept or properties. Irrespectively of the conceptual indistinguishability from any other *birth*, it is an event of the *absolute* beginning, emergence from *nothingness*. As such, it establishes an ineradicable, numerical *unity*, *haecceitas* of this individual, which is his *origin*, the point

<sup>246</sup> Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §69 “Once there is any manifold, there must be a precedent unity.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:6.3] We should, however, be careful with embracing all variants of neo-Platonic units too enthusiastically. The ‘wholes’ and ‘unities’ have much more conceptual flavor, and are not distinguished from the *immediate* identity. In fact, the contentless self-identity of the most immediate object is taken, here as elsewhere, as an epitome of unity. Even the justification of this very proposition ends with the possibility of the preceding unity being indecomposable atoms, which must lie at the bottom of any division.

<sup>247</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 346-7

<sup>248</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Life: a story in search of a narrator*

<sup>249</sup> B. Pascal, *Pensées*. VII:553 [modified]

<sup>250</sup> “Unique” and “unity” originate in the same Latin “unus” – one.

beyond thought and experience, where he touches *nothingness*.<sup>251</sup> No visible criteria account for this *unity*. “If we take wholly away all Consciousness of our Actions and Sensations, especially Pleasure and Pain, and the concernment that accompanies it, it will be hard to know wherein to place personal Identity.”<sup>252</sup> It is not easy to imagine what ‘taking wholly away’ might mean, but allowing that, it would be exactly the place where to look for ‘personal Identity’. “[I]f we had nothing distinct in our perceptions, nothing heightened, or of a stronger flavour, so to speak, we would be in a permanent stupor. And this is the condition of the completely naked monad.”<sup>253</sup>

Unity is the *absolute* identity – *absolute*, that is, trans-phenomenal, relative to *nothing*. It 178. is not a consistency of a *totality*, neither is it the identity of *dissociated actualities*, but their ultimate *foundation* – the *virtuality* of the origin. It does not have ‘parts’ but aspects. It is not an intrinsically relative totality where the *actual* elements are put side-by-side and connected by another element, a *visible* relation; it is a *nexus*, a *virtual* center, in which they have, as yet, not received their *actual* determinations and in which they are inviolably woven together. It is not identity for the *aspects* are *virtually* distinct, although these *distinctions* have not, as yet, reached the crisp delineations which they will eventually obtain in the *actual* experience or *reflection*.<sup>254</sup>

According to Cusanus, “there is only one essence of all, which is participated differently. It is participated differently because [...] two things cannot be perfectly alike and, consequently, participate one essence precisely and equally.”<sup>255</sup> Hmm... What is the ground and what the effect here? Here is a clue: “The universe, as most perfect, has preceded all things in the order of nature, as it were, so that it could be each thing in each thing.”<sup>256</sup> The universal, ‘only one essence’ is hardly anything obtained by identifying indiscernibles. In *actual* terms it is obtained by identifying discernibles, the incomprehensible *coincidentia oppositorum*. We do not need such a *coincidentia*, because *actuality* is not our beginning. The *one* is that which precedes all possible discrimination; if you like, something always assumed, never deduced. Its *unity* is not reducible to *actual* observations, for it *founds* the unity of each level. The *one* is the *unity* of the *chaos*, *chaos* is the unity of *experience* and *experience* is the unity of *experiences*. Or more specifically, *virtual signification* is the unity of *recognition* which, in turn, *founds* the unity of *aspects* involved in *representation*; or *simultaneity* is the unity of *spatio-temporality* and of *awareness* which *found*, respectively, the unity of space, of time and of *reflective consciousness*. But these *founded* differences do not change their *founding unity*. Ultimately, every human *existence* ‘participates equally’, in the ontological order, the ‘only one essence of all’.

The ultimate *unity* is the *one*: the *indistinct* is the ultimate limit of all *distinctions* and of 179. the very possibility of *distinguishing*, remaining forever beyond their horizon. Repetition and ‘recurrence’ are not mere accidents; they provide an abstract, that is *actual* and often *precise*, characterisation of all our being – experiencing the repetitions of the *one*, recognising *one* through Many, experiencing it always in new ways, in new *actualities*, from new perspectives... The *one* is not an object of any *actual* experience, all such experiences, all *distinctions* are but manifestations of the *one*, always under different forms, in different *actual* clothes. The *one* is experienced but only through, or under, these variations – it is *one* and the same, and yet, *actually* always different, as one *actual* experience is different from another. The *one* is experienced only through all the *distinctions* and thus it is the ultimate violation of indiscernibility of *identicals* – in *actual* experiences it is thoroughly different, it is never given, and hence never given as the same, and yet it is always itself, always identical.

<sup>251</sup> Thus we must finally admit the misuse of this Scotist term. According to Duns Scotus, every individual thing has the individuating entity which, so to speak, follows after and in addition to the being of its essence, *esse essentia*, endowing it with the actual and individual existence, *esse existentia*. We do not worry so much about the identities of *actual* things, and we do not see so much difference between human *existence* and its ‘essence’ – the unique individuality constituted by the confrontation with the *one* can be equally identified with both, and *haecceitas* refers to this triple identification.

<sup>252</sup> J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. II:I.11.

<sup>253</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *The Monadology*. §24

<sup>254</sup> That the *virtuality* of an origin has not *as yet* been *precisely* separated indicates not only the temporal dimension – the higher levels, the earlier hypostases remain *present* as the lower ones emerge. The unities of various aspects, their *virtual* origins are experienced thoroughly and intimately, even if *reflection* focuses its attention only on their *dissociated aspects*. Thus *unity* is a constant element of experience, a constant *rest* which looms in the background and for ever refuses to be drawn down to the categories of *actuality*.

<sup>255</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I:VII.48-49

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. II:5.117. You can easily imagine the close analogies to the unity of the Leibniz’s system, his pre-established harmony, reflection of the whole universe in every monad, and the (resulting) principle of identity of indiscernibles.

Our being – and our understanding, in particular – is stretched between these two limiting poles: on the one hand, the idealistic intuition of everything being but a manifestation of *one* and the same and, on the other hand, the fact which from the *reflective experience's* standpoint is incontestable: that everything is a separate entity related only, if at all, ideally to something else. It might be tempting to construct a contradiction but the two do not contradict each other – they only express the extreme and complementary aspects of existence which experiences one only through many. The great challenge of *reflection* starting from the *dissociated experiences* is ideal abstraction – to *re-construct* (parts of) this variety as manifestations of the same: star movements and falling apples as gravitational force; matter and work as energy; addition and multiplication as monoidal structure; God of the New Testament and God of the Old Testament as the same God, perhaps, even as the God of Muslims and the non-god of Buddhists; the yesterday's pleasure and today's conflict as aspects of the same loving relationship.

"What a shock of *recognition* it was (as it actually happened to me) while studying with wonder the plate of Corot engraving – to see it suddenly as a delicious episode from 'Parsifal'."<sup>257</sup> Insights of the identity of differences are among the greatest intellectual pleasures. One knows experiences which after a long and tedious work bring two apparently unrelated ends of the reasoning chain into a unity of a single realisation. We have a problem in front of us which 'does not fit', which we can not grasp because we feel that there is something which evades and prevents us from solving it. And then comes an 'Aha!' – a crucial *distinction* (and connection is, too, a *distinction*) which solves the problem, which makes everything fall on its place. It may be too much of subtleties, but we would say that it is not the evading *distinction* which brings the pleasure when it reaches the level of consciousness. This *distinction* has been there all the time, albeit, merely in the *vague, virtual* form of the cognitive dissonance, of the uneasy feeling that something is missing. The pleasure arises from the fact that this *distinction*, now clearly *re-cognised*, 'makes everything fall on its place' establishing a new unity.

The power of thought lies precisely in this: to *re-cognise* repetitions, to *re-cognise* the same in a variety of differences. Only that, as far as *reflection* is concerned, it is seldom enough to claim the underlying identity – it has to be *reflectively represented*, it has to become *visible* for *reflection* if it is to be *actually given* and convincing. Appreciating all such thoughts and smaller or greater experiences, one must always remember the great danger of any claims to unity misconstrued as uniformity, of claims which simply try to erase the differences in the postulated but never *experienced* pseudo-unity. For better or worse, in the sphere of *actual experiences*, *unity* is reflected as relative identities. Rilke's verse:

Wer rechnet userer Ertrag? Wer trennt  
uns von den alten, den vergangenen Jahren?  
Was haben wir seit Anbeginn erfahren,  
als dass sich eins im anderen erkennt? <sup>258</sup>

notices the fact, but this fact has to be rendered concrete in every particular case: the reflection of one in another, the gathering of *actual distinctions* into a unity, has to be established for each situation or problem and, often, it has to be established again and again to remind us constantly that "[i]f many participate in one, they are unified in their relation to the one" even though "they are different from each other to the degree, in which they are many."<sup>259</sup> The highest *unity* does not dissolve the differentiation of the lower levels, does not mingle distinct elements in a flat uniformity. On the contrary, it lets them remain differentiated, even opposed to each other, for all such lower oppositions and conflicts do not contradict the genuine *unity*.

180. Eventually, the *absolute unity* is the *unity* of the *one*. The undifferentiated, *indistinct* *one* is one and the same, is the *unity* underlying – that is, in the order of ontological *founding*, preceding – all the *distinctions*. This *unity* finds its *concrete* place, its *imago*, in the beings separated directly from, and hence *confronted* directly with the *one*. *Self*, the *virtual* center of every existence, founded in the *one*, *founds* the *unity* of the whole existence. The lower form of this *imago* is the fact of *myself* being a repetition, a repetition of the unique event of *birth*, and then *my self*, of the 'inborn possibility'. *My uniqueness* is not constituted by anything more particular, but is given

<sup>257</sup> P. Valery, *Estampes de Corot*., [preface] *About Corot*

<sup>258</sup> R. M. Rilke, *Es winkt zu Fühlung...*

<sup>259</sup> Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §66

to me. Every existence, to the extent it is an existence, is unique and as such but a repetition of any other existence: to the extent they “participate in One, they are one in the relation to the One.” I am unique and you are unique and in this uniqueness we are both the same. There is no paradox here – only the primitive character of the *unity* of existence (if one likes, of the numerical difference of indiscernibles) which is *founded* in the ultimate *invisibility* of *birth* from the *origin*. At the level of *actuality*, this is again reflected in the repetition as recurrence of the same, in the temporal identity of *actual* things, as well as in *me* seen as the merely *actual* *ego* being the same now as *I* was yesterday. Finally, in the *immediacy* of a single act, the *unity* finds its *reflection* as the self-identity of the *immediately* given *object* and as the unproblematic self-identity of the *subject*, of the *immediate* act of *cogito*.

### 2.2.3.ii. Truth

As another example of a *trace*, which however will turn out to be closely related to the previous one, we consider the notion of truth.

#### What can be true

“Please, close the door!” Can this be true? No, of course, it is a command, not a statement expressing a proposition. But then, suppose you close the door and he says: “No, I did not mean it, I was only joking”. The command was not true or...? The command was not meant as a command or even better, the sentence, the *sign* which usually means a command in this particular situation did not mean it. It was a joke, not a true command. One would probably wish that we get rid of this “true”, but we will not. The word “true” used about work of art or feeling or almost anything is indeed “put in front of another word in order to show that this word is to be understood in its proper, unadulterated sense.”<sup>260</sup> Thus a true command is a command, and not a joke. But if a *sign* expressing a command can be a joke, is it not fully natural and legitimate to speak also about “true command” and distinguish it from, well, “untrue” ones? This is not much different from distinguishing a command from a non-command, but the crucial issue is that we have a *sign*, a sentence, which although usually is one may also be the another. Just like Tarski formed originally the biconditionals for propositions

$$\text{The sentence "X" is true if and only if X.} \quad (i)$$

one can form a biconditional for almost every word and a thing *x*

$$“x” \text{ is a true “P” if and only if } x \text{ is P.} \quad (ii)$$

The meaning of “true friend” might thus seem no different from the meaning of “friend” and this is probably what one would make out of it, if one were to construct any formal theory.<sup>261</sup> But we are not after reducing anything to anything, and this schema is not fully satisfying. “True friend” can easily mean the opposite of what “friend” happens to mean in a given situation, and then it can mean at least as many different things as “friend” can. We do not believe in any genuine, primary, ‘true’ meaning of a word, of which others would only be derivative or adultered versions. The genuine and inherent vagueness of *signs* was discussed in I:4.1.§§59.ff. One recognises, of course, the difference of accent and emphasis. As presententialism, or variants of deflationism might claim, “true” functions at best as a means of emphasis or indirect reference. However, the emphasis may in fact amount to new *distinctions*: the increased need to emphasize that things are *truly* what they are, that “*x* is a *true* friend”, that “*y* is *truly* useful”, etc. signals certain linguistic degeneration, one might say, deflation of the meaning of the words where, like in the Orwellian world, “friend” no longer means what it truly means.

On the other hand, even if “true friend” tends to mean the same as “friend”, so “false friend” does not simply mean a non-friend. A friend may be false when, contrary to all appearances, contrary to all *signs* indicating and usually meaning friendship, he turns out not to be one.

*Signs* are the *actual* points terminating the *traces* of *transcendence*, *actual* expressions of non-

<sup>260</sup>G. Frege, *The thought: a logical inquiry*. p.86

<sup>261</sup>The schema (ii) is, more or less, the same as the basic case of the inductive definition of satisfaction for, e.g., first-order logic.

*actual*, and eventually of *invisible distinctions*. Signs which we usually do not consider to carry truth-value (because they do not express propositions? or even worse, because they are not declarative sentences?) may be considered true in the generous sense of drawing the *distinctions* in accordance with the rest of relevant *distinctions*, whether *actual* or only *present*. “Please, close the door!” may be true – with respect to the actual wishes of the one who pronounces it. Similarly, a question normally suggests that the person asking it does not know, and can be true with respect to this. Rhetorical question is exactly an untrue question, a non-question, which only appears as a question. In short, there is hardly any linguistic sign which could not be endowed with the element of the truth-value (which does not mean, that it must be its primary element). But truth is not restricted to linguistic signs. “If you were in a place where you knew that there were both healthy and poisonous herbs, though you did not know how to distinguish between them, but there was someone else there whom you did not doubt knew how to distinguish them, and when you asked him he told you which were the healthy and which poisonous, and he told you that some were healthy yet he himself ate others, which would you believe, his word or his deed?”<sup>262</sup> His deed tells the truth which his words tried to hide.

This could be easily misinterpreted as follows: what we consider as possibly true need not have an appearance of a proposition, but must be expressible as a proposition. If a question can be true, it is because it expresses also some proposition. “It is easy to think of a language in which there is not a form for questions, or commands, but questions and commands are expressed in the form of statements, e.g., in forms corresponding to our ‘I should like to know if...’ and ‘My wish is that...’”<sup>263</sup> So a command could be a joke or else a true command but then there is a corresponding proposition which is false, respectively true. If one insisted obsessively on this point, we might even let it pass but the problem is with the status of propositions, not to mention their actual content. There is a much deeper sense in which a command, and every act or action, may be true, than merely by rewriting its meaning as a declarative sentence. It can be true in the sense of being a good command, a command which agrees with the human nature, a command the following of which will help one to realise one’s true goal, a command which commands to do what should be done, in short, by agreeing not only with the actually given facts and observations but also with the deepest *distinctions* drawn across the field of whole life. One can certainly deny the very existence of such things, but such a denial will be rather only an expression of the uncertainty (or the lack of consensus) as to which particular commands are good and how they can possibly be distinguished from the bad (false?) ones. On the other hand, one might object that this is an illegitimate stretching of the meaning of the word “true”. Such an accusation starts from the assumption that only propositions, if not merely declarative sentences, can be true (or false) and this is exactly the assumption which we do not share. In a deeper, most philosophical sense (to which we will return later) the truth-bearer is ... *actuality*. Every *actual sign*, every appearance (whether a friendly attitude, a command, a statement) makes a difference and hence carries an element of truth.

### Truth and falsehood

183. Meaning, we said in I:§59, is a trace of the primordial nexus of signification. It arises as a consequence of the dissociation of sign and signified giving rise to the abstract signs as opposed to *distinctions* they may signify. Emergence of *actuality* from the horizon of experience increases the distance – the distance which separates one from the origin but also, in the most mundane form, the distance between the *actual signs* and the *actual* as well as present *distinctions*. Sign functions only in a context of usage but what makes it into a sign is the fact that it carries its meaning – the potential for drawing (particular) *distinctions* – with it. This peculiarity of abstract signs, of representations as reflective doubles, dissolves the reactive character of original signs and turns representation into an act, something not merely conditioned by the external stimulus but involving also an element of spontaneity.

Truth is now an adventure of meaning, of the representations dissociated from their origins and capable of actively effecting *distinctions*. Original signs are, in a sense, always true, for they are not dissociated from their meaning. Dissociated, reflective signs, on the other hand, carry

---

<sup>262</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *On Truth*. 9

<sup>263</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Appendix III:1 – ???

their own meanings, meanings which need not comply with the horizon of *distinctions* to which they are addressed. Falsity (in any form, as a mistake, misunderstanding, lie) is possible only as a result of *representation*, of the *dissociation of sign* (with its *meaning*) and the context of the addressed *distinctions*. Most abstractly, falsity is a break, a mismatch between the *actual* and the *present* – truth emerges as the desirable norm opposed to that. *Representations* can also address the *actual distinctions* and thus arises also the possibility of *representation* to disagree with the given *actuality*. Truth vs. falsity is a distinction within the sphere of meaning...<sup>264</sup> Lying is, from the point of view of the development of consciousness, a pretty advanced stage – animals are not very cunning liars, even though they may sometimes be deceitful. Crying babies do not lie, crying youngsters and adults often do. “A child has much to learn before it can pretend. (A dog cannot be a hypocrite, but neither can he be sincere.)”<sup>265</sup> The ability to lie marks the transition past the level of the immediate truth of *signs* to their final, *reflective dissociation*, and the ability to lie in a convincing, sophisticated way is *equipollent* with an advanced system of *representations*.

Truth restores the unity disturbed by falsehood, and so the question about the former presupposes clarification of the latter. Truth as an explicit, *actual* phenomenon – as a desirable norm – enters the stage only as distinguished from, in fact, as a consequence of the possible falsehood. It is the possibility of an *actual sign* to mislead, to lie, to mean something which turns out to be different from what is the case, that is, to draw some *distinctions* in a way which does not conform to the rest of *distinctions* which are *present* (relevant), in short, the possibility of mistake and failure, which constitutes truth as the desired norm. Thus, although truth as a fact, as the primordial *unity* is the background against which falsehood emerges as its violation, it is falsehood which founds the truth as an *actual norm*.<sup>266</sup> It is the *actuality* of falsehood, rather than of truth, which gives rise to the *distinction* between the two. It is falsehood which is the crucial *distinction* – the *distinction* between the *meaning* of an abstract *sign* and the *distinctions* of the addressed background, the *distinction* whose possibility appears first as a consequence of the *reflective dissociation*. 184.

### ***Excluded Middle?***

185.

All *actuality* is a *sign*, and *signs* are truth-bearers. In a sense, one could therefore say that, since every *actuality* is surrounded by the horizon of *presence* and hence can agree or disagree with it, every *sign* is true or false and the scope of the *tertium non datur* is unlimited. But we would prefer to view truth as an explicit norm which arises only against the possible falsehood. As long as such possibility does not arise, there is no need for truth or, as one could also say, truth is implicitly granted. The fundamental claim is that truth is secondary in relation to meaning, that *sign* is a *sign* in so far as it means something, as it makes a difference by drawing a *distinction*, but it need not be true or false for that.<sup>267</sup> We traced an aspect of truth even in commands and questions but typically the meaning of such *signs* overshadows the truth-aspect completely. Better examples are given by the traditional paradoxes.

(L) This sentence is false.

The impossibility of assigning any truth-value to (L) has been declared a paradox. But this appears so only in the context of bivalent logic which insists on all statements having one of the only two truth-values.<sup>268</sup> The additional identification of meaning with truth-conditions forces then one to

---

<sup>264</sup>We do not oppose the Quine/Davidson claim about the field linguist's need to figure out beliefs and meanings of native speakers simultaneously. Indeed, from such a perspective divorcing truth from belief and belief from meaning seems impossible. But we are not doing any linguistics, nor even any philosophy of language. We only claim that in the generative order of *founding* meaning precedes truth. A child's world is full of *signs* (occurring only as the *distinctions* which are their meanings) before some *dissociated signs* turn out to be lies, or mistakes.

<sup>265</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. II:xii

<sup>266</sup>First failures of innocence have the mood of disappointment with an unfaithful friend. One is disappointed – not by one's incapacity and failure (such egotic worries come later), but by the world which deceived one. According to Lurianic Cabala, «shevirat ha-kelim», ‘breaking of the vessels’, is the second stage of the world development, in which the divine light enclosed in the finite vessels disperses as the vessels break under the strain, resulting in disharmony and evil, which will now await for the final stage of «tiqqun», ‘restoration’.

<sup>267</sup>“What a picture represents it represents independently of its truth or falsity, by means of its pictorial form.” [L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. 2.22]

<sup>268</sup>If (L) is true, than *what it says* holds, but it *says that...* One might object that it is only the meaning of the components of (L) which is known, while the whole statement fails to have one. But this looks like splitting the hair. We do not combine arbitrarily the meanings of “false”, “statement”, “is”, “this” but do it exactly according to the rule specified by this statement.

declare the statement meaningless. But one can not meaningfully claim that it is meaningless, since one arrives at this conclusion by analysing its truth-value as a function of ...its meaning.

We do not see any paradox here nor, for that matter, in Tarski's general formulation of such phenomena, the undefinability theorem, stating that a semantically closed language can not obey the rules of classical logic.<sup>269</sup> The proof shows that such a language contains sentences which, like (L), do not have any well defined truth-value. Why should it cause any worries? Why should it be so that every statement must have exactly one of two possible truth values? We know, in fact, that it is not so – besides (L) and other paradoxes, there are other dubious cases like “the sea-battle tomorrow”, “the current king of France who is bald”, etc. Various ways may be designed to endow such statements with a truth-value, but they tend to over-interpret the intuitive meaning. All the theorem says is that the truth-value of (L) can not be determined in the world of boolean functions working (according to the classical rules) on the two standard truth-values.<sup>270</sup>

186. It is only the assumption that the world is a given and fixed *totality* of things or facts ‘in themselves’, which leads to the conviction that every sign (at least, proposition) is either true or false, and that with the absolute – that is unchangeable – finality. The lack of such a finality does not mean relativism in the sense of subjective arbitrariness; it only means that any particular truth can happen to be extended/adjusted/modfied, and that the *absolute* truth, the *absolute Yes or No*, does not belong to such particulars but only to the *absolute*.

The absence of precise bivalence and the limitations of the principle of excluded middle go even further: truth, and hence also falsehood, is a matter of degree. Saying that “*x* is blue” about an *x* which is pink is trivially false. Is saying that “*x* is blue” about an *x* which is dark blue true? Yes, if darkness does not matter. And no if it does. But when it is not true, is it false? Perhaps, perhaps only to a degree. A half-truth is often a falsehood but, then, it is also a half-*truth*. Proliferation of various theories of fuzzy sets and fuzzy truth, of vague and probabilistic variants of the notions treated traditionally as rigid distinctions, witnesses to the changing understanding of these notions. Truth, admitting of degrees, is not simply opposed to falsehood which, too, is a matter of degrees. They are opposite but the opposition is not a pure, univocal bivalence. Just like most acts are neither good nor evil, so most *actual signs* are neither true nor false. There is a large grey zone between the two extremes, and *signs* falling in this zone may often be declared true *and* false or, as the case or wish may be, as neither.

## Truth

187. Truth is a possible property of *actuality* and, consequently of *actual signs* and their linguistic expressions. It is a relation between two (sets of) *distinctions*: the truth-bearing *actual signs* and the truth-giving (*actual* or not) *distinctions*. Denoting the former by S and the latter by D, saying “S is true” means “S is true with respect to D”. Frege’s objection (actually, to the correspondence theory, which here can be extended to D), that truth cannot consist in a relation for this “is contradicted by the use of the word “true”, which is not a relation-word and contains no reference to anything else to which something must correspond”<sup>271</sup> is a funny example of the strange assumption that language, and in fact already its common usage, contains all and only truth.<sup>272</sup> D is hardly ever mentioned explicitly because it is determined by the *shared* background of communication, by the context of discourse.<sup>273</sup> We mentioned the possible disagreement between the *represented* and given *actuality*. The *distance* between the two can be seen as the difference between S and D, when not only the former but also the latter involves (primarily) only *actual distinctions*. Saying “It is sunny”, we do not specify “at present, at the place where we are talking, with respect to the

<sup>269</sup>To avoid technicalities, let us think of the semantically closed languages simply as those containing their own truth predicate and the self-referential capacities. ‘Classical logic’ means here for us primarily two truth-values.

<sup>270</sup>Some newer and more inventive theories of truth no longer insist on the bivalence and, instead, try to accommodate such phenomena, as is done, for instance, in the revision theory of truth, where truth of a statement is the fix-point of the appropriate unfolding of its meaning and where some statements may simply not have such a fix-point. E.g., A. Gupta, *Truth and paradox*; H. Herzberger, *Notes on naive semantics*; A. Gupta, N. Belnap, *The Revision Theory of Truth*.

<sup>271</sup>G. Frege, *The thought: a logical inquiry*.

<sup>272</sup>There are few traces of the relative motion in ordinary language use, so that claiming that trees along the alley actually move as I am walking would be not only unnatural but *actually contradicted* by the use of the word “move”.

<sup>273</sup>Thus, not only context disambiguates the meaning but also vice versa, meaning narrows the context of interpretation – the two are *aspects* of one *nexus*.

actually observed weather conditions, etc.” – all such indexicals are implicitly given. Saying “Life is a disappointment”, we do not specify that we do not mean ‘at present, at the place where we are talking, etc.’ In practice, D is usually fully transparent, given implicitly by the meaning of S.<sup>274</sup>

The meaning of S is some set of *distinctions* which itself constitutes a part of the world and hence this *meaning* is by its very nature woven into the texture of the world, into the rest of the present *distinctions*. The statement “It is sunny” draws some *distinctions* in the actual situation and these are related to other *distinctions*, for instance, to those which we can draw by looking around or by (not) feeling raindrops on the head.

The meaning of “Life is a disappointment” draws some distinctions in the actual situation: perhaps, it is a general statement about life, perhaps, only an expression of the depressive period in the life of one uttering it, perhaps, only a sarcastic comment on a train of somebody else’s complains. The vagueness of the statement amounts to indeterminacy of meaning which, in extreme cases, may make search for its truth futile. But even without any clearer indications, one will recognise in such a statement an expression of some *quality* which may seem more or less in agreement with one’s own understanding of life. The *distinctions* (D) implied by the meaning of the statement are completely different from the previous case, but the truth of both has the same general form of agreement between the respective sets of *distinctions*.

The question about the nature of truth reduces almost to the question about meaning; there is no “more to truth than the meaning of words and the way the world is”. The crucial issue concerns, of course, this last phrase. In our case, ‘the way the world is’ corresponds, in every particular situation, to some more *distinctions*, or else to some *distinctions* made by other means than the (linguistic) *signs* whose truth is under the question. Very schematically, we can express the required relation between S and D as follows:

$$S \text{ is true with respect to } D \text{ iff } m(S) \subseteq D \quad (\text{iii})$$

i.e., a *sign* (or a collection thereof) S is true with respect to D iff it means/makes only *distinctions* made in D.<sup>275</sup>

The relativity to D certainly will not lead us to any relativism or scepticism. But it is not only apparent. Truth of a *sign* depends on the object it addresses; truths about relative beings are, by this very fact, relative, while *absolute* truth can only concern the *absolute*. The stick lying at the bottom of a river is more like a snake, bending, swinging and swaying, drawn half-way out of the water it is bent, and drawn completely out it is straight. Descartes concludes that our sense-perceptions delude us (at least in the first two cases) and can not be trusted. It remains unclear why they delude us in the two former cases but not in the last one, and the particularly suspicious minds keep playing the games of total illusion, brains in the vats, and the like. We would rather say that our senses are equally truthful in all three cases: in the first two what we see is true with respect to the visual *distinctions* (to put it blatantly: what we see is what we see, and there is no falsity about it); in the third case, what we see is true also with respect to other *distinctions*, say, those made by the sense of touch and, for that matter, our knowledge that the stick remains unaffected by the way any particular person might see it.<sup>276</sup>

---

<sup>274</sup>This meaning involves what Austin calls the “demonstrative conventions” [J. L. Austin, *Truth*.] correlating the words with the actual, historic situation in the world. But likewise, it involves also indications that some words are not to be so correlated. All such relations and correlations are aspects of *meaning* in our generous sense of all the drawn *distinctions*.

<sup>275</sup>As a curio: this can be reformulated so that every truth comes out as an identity, for instance, using Boole’s  $\nu D$  for ‘a subset of D’, and writing  $m(S) = \nu D$ , or in a more modern form, using the equivalent formulation of the subset relation:  $m(S) \cup D = D$ . Of course, we use this pseudo-formal notation merely as a symbolic device. It may be helpful, but  $\subseteq$  may equally well be replaced by some other form of ‘fitting’ or ‘conformity’. We do not intend any formally precise theory of anything.

<sup>276</sup>The point expressed traditionally by saying that truth is not the matter of perception but of judgment, e.g., “truth or falsity seems to me to be in opinion rather than in the senses. For if the inner sense is deceived, the exterior does not lie to it. [...] This is the case when someone similar to someone else is thought to be him, or when hearing something other than human voice we think it to be a human voice. But it is the interior sense that does this. [...] So it happens that interior sense imputes its mistake to the exterior sense.” [St. Anselm of Canterbury, *On Truth*. 6] “It is therefore correct to say that the senses do not err – not because they always judge rightly but because they do not judge at all.” [I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. I:2nd Division.Introduction.1 [A293/B350]] Eventually, the judgment was supposed to relate to the ultimate sphere against which all particular cases were to be judged, while we have replaced this sphere with D.

The relativity to D is a common feature of truth theories which differ primarily with respect to what they consider to be the relevant D.<sup>277</sup> The schema (iii) contains the abstracted elements involved in most discussions of truth and thus allows us also to see some of the differences between various approaches. For instance:

- Truth-conditionalism uses the same formula but to define  $m(\_)$  and not truth. Instead of assuming given  $m(\_)$ , it takes as fixed D (the world, totality of facts, or the like) and the understanding of the left hand side. The truth-condition, corresponding to the subset inclusion, amounts then to a definition of the meaning function  $m(\_)$ .
- Correspondence theories take D (and hence also the target of  $m(\_)$ ) to be the external world. (How this is to be understood is another matter.)
- Coherence theories also fix D but take it to be some set of accepted beliefs.
- Pragmatists would like D to be some ideal, eventual conditions to be judged as desirable (or, perhaps, just that which will remain ‘there in the end’ (let us not ask where ‘there’ is and when ‘the end’ might be)), with  $m(\_)$  assigning to its argument the outcome of actions done in accordance with it.
- Deflationists take D to be the whole universe (i.e., make any inclusion in D trivial, which amounts to removing D), and let  $m(\_)$  simply remove the quotation marks around S.

It is impossible to dissociate the discussion of truth from ontology. The differences above concern the understanding of the reference frame D. With the latter theories (coherentism, pragmatism) it is not, perhaps, ontology in the usual sense, yet it acquires a fundamental meaning for the theory *because* it functions as the measure of truth, as an element of a transcendent character, if not as the transcendence itself. A critique of some theory of truth amounts usually to a critique of this frame, of the presupposed (or implied) ontology. In the following, we will distinguish the kinds of truth depending on D, on the addressed level of *distinctions*. But first one final remark.

189. Truth is a *trace of transcendence* in the *immanence* of the *actual signs* and the reference frame D can vary according to the possible variations in the scope of *transcendence*. Something can be considered true with respect to: a particular situation, some given observations and experiments, the life experience, the (un)imaginable *totality* of all *distinctions*. Consequently, truth admits of degrees, and only having fixed D, one can possibly speak about *the truth*. For although D may vary as much as S, the very relation (iii) can be obtained, at least in principle, in every particular case. One could then imagine the equality S=D as the ultimate truth about D, while every partial truth about D as its proper subset. We could also have disjoint S1 and S2, both true with respect to D – completely different truths about the same. Also, triviality is possible only when D is fixed or, as we can also say, when some things are obvious. Triviality (whether true or false) is something which makes no difference, not an S with empty meaning but as S with meaning which in no way contributes to the actual situation – it only repeats some already given *distinctions*.

In a particular situation, it is often much more important and difficult to agree on which aspects to consider relevant, than on the content of each aspect, it is more difficult to agree on D than on S. This is only a local reflection of the more general fact, namely, that even the most stubborn realists have not managed to come up with a convincing model of the world, of the ultimate D which could (should and would) serve as the constant measure of truth, §186. The world we live in is the world of *distinctions* which we are able and forced to recognise. Now, the more *distinctions* D, the more (possible) truths but also, by the same token, the more falsehoods.<sup>278</sup> “One is certain of one’s knowledge only when one knows little; doubts increase with knowledge.” There is probably some limit beyond which more differentiation, needed as it may seem in the search for further knowledge, breeds only more confusion and idle dispute, where “every solution

<sup>277</sup>D appears, in one form or another, in all explicit models: for instance, in formal model theory, as the actual structure (perhaps, with the assignments to the free variables) in which the truth of the formula S is evaluated; in situation semantics of Barwise and Perry, as the situation addressed by the utterance, in Kripke semantics for modal logic as the actual world, among all possible ones, etc., etc. But we are interested in more mundane situations.

<sup>278</sup>If such observations were of relevance, one could point that, according to (iii), the number of truths grows exponentially with the number of *distinctions*.

to a problem is a new problem,”<sup>279</sup> where every new step, multiplying the truths, or rather only probabilities and possibilities of truths, removes us from the truth. Saying too much (thirst for precision shares at least that much with its frequent companion – the fear of triviality) is more often than not a violation of the truth. The true art is not only to know what can be said but, primarily, to know what can not and therefore should not even be asked for. “And it is no easie matter, being in the midst of the cariere of a discourse, to stop cunningly, to make sudden period, and to cut it off. And there is nothing whereby the cleane strenght of a horse is more knowne, than to make a readie and cleane stop.”<sup>280</sup> As La Rochefoucauld remarked, the problem of perspicacity is not that it does not reach the end but that it goes beyond it.

As D varies, and sceptics, relativists and post-modernists misuse the fact, one might want to imagine its being fixed once and for all, as some ideal *totality* of all facts, the ultimate reference frame where truth of all possible truth-bearers is to be evaluated. “The world” would be a common name for such a thing, which would also dispense with the degrees of truth and unpleasant relativity. Or so, at least, it seems. We have said what such ideal *totalities* are good for, but we will return to this, as well as to the question about the *absolute* truth, discussing the levels of truth below.

### The levels of truth

Truth-bearers are always *actual signs*. Truth is a *trace of transcendence* reflecting the anchoring of these in the wider reality. What is taken as this ‘wider reality’ determines the understanding, if not a detailed theory, of truth. The level, or depth, of a truth is simply a reflection of the level addressed by the *signs*, which corresponds to D in schema (iii).

#### 1. *The immediate truth*

190.

Sensation, if not also perception, can always be taken as true with respect to itself, and this is the way of immanent truth taken by sensualism or phenomenism, whether of empirical or idealistic flavour. Every sensation is true with respect to the fact of its occurrence. In fact, every *sign* is true if taken only with respect to the trivial *distinction* of its mere being given: it makes a difference whether “qukkda” is given here or not. It is, however, such a trivial and irrelevant difference that one will hardly ever take it into account. We are, after all, not interested in mere *immediacy* but in what it means.

The rationalistic variant of this level of truth takes into account not only the trivial coincidence of the *immediate signs* and their meanings but the possible *distance* between meanings of abstract signs and the addressed reality. It appeals to *immediate* ideas which appear as self-evident, that is, unconditionally true.<sup>281</sup> We will not repeat here the remarks on idealised *immediacy* from 1.1.2 (in particular, §§7 ff), but only notice again that, all the differences notwithstanding, phenomenism and rationalism join the ranks in so far as the infallibility of the truth they are searching for is found in the *immediacy*, whether of sensations or self-evidence. In either case, the reduction to *immediacy* means reduction to pure *subjectivity*. This conclusion was not necessarily drawn by the proponents of the respective ideas, but as the understanding of truth it amounts to solipsism: the whole truth is the pure *immediacy*, that is, pure *subjectivity*.

But truth is a *trace of the ultimate unity* and hence it carries within itself the sense of *transcendence* which is impossible to dissolve in any subjectivistic reductions. Truth can hardly be dissociated from ontology. Cartesian ultimate certainty, *Cogito ergo sum*, places itself in the *immediate subjectivity*: the point of self-evidence which, however, unless augmented by God with some additional insights, would leave one in the perfect self-satisfaction (or shall we rather say, despair?) of a solipsist. Exactly the same threat appears to Philonous who, having reduced the existence (and truth) to being *immediately* perceived, has to invoke higher consciousness to ensure any *real* existence and truth.<sup>282</sup>

191.

To avoid solipsism one has to give up the limitation to the irrefutability of the *immediate signs* and admit some *distance*. As we have seen, the *objective aspect* of this level, its ontology (if we

<sup>279</sup> Goethe

<sup>280</sup> M. E. Montaigne, *Of Lyers*.

<sup>281</sup> Truth becoming mere certainty is a constant aspect of this reduction, which accompanies verificationism and coherentism alike. “All you have any dealings with are your doubts and beliefs [...] Now that which you do not at all doubt, you must and do regard as infallible, absolute truth.” [C. S. Pierce, *What is pragmatism*. p.188-9]

<sup>282</sup> G. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*..., II

may misuse the term), is a disappearing point, an *immediate, external object*. Supported by all the common-sense one can invoke, truth becomes thus correspondence of the *immediate, subjective sign* and the equally *immediate* but *external object*. This conception has been dominating since Aristotle's famous: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true."<sup>283</sup> We won't analyse it in all possible aspects, but want to show its association with the principle declared by much of the tradition to be the fundamental 'law of thought', if not also of 'being'.

192. "[I]t is impossible for anything at the same time to be and not to be."<sup>284</sup> Indeed, the *objects*, the self-identical, indivisible 'substances', solidified complete notions whose reality is consummated in the *immediate limit of actuality* make the principle of contradiction most natural and obvious. The condition 'at the same time' is decisive and it is this condition which narrows the horizon of attention to pure *immediacy*, the ideality of extensionless 'now'. Within so narrow a scope of the *horizon of actuality*, an *object* can not both be and not-be, and as it is assumed to possess only equally *immediate* properties, it can not both be-so and not-be-so.

Let's also notice that, although the principle is stated few lines earlier in a more epistemological terms, "it is impossible for the same man at the same time to believe the same thing to be and not to be", it is immediately turned into an ontological principle. This reflects the reduction not only of understanding and reflective knowledge, but also of being to the pure *immediacy*.

But what is this, apparently so obvious, 'at the same time'? An *x* can not be simultaneously black and not black. OK, but the whole issue is this 'simultaneity'. It is not even some imagined 'least possible passage of time', but a residual and timeless point of immediacy. If I see an object having and not having a property (or being and not being), I 'know' that some passage of time must have been involved. (An alternative way of dissolving the contradiction would be to postulate different objects.) We do not deal here with a fundamental principle – of non-contradiction – but with a *nexus* of which this principle is only an *aspect*. Simultaneity, taken for granted in the above formulation, is needed to obtain the principle but, equally well, the principle itself can serve as the basis for 'defining' simultaneity – as the limit of differentiation, as the limit excluding any possible contradiction. Such a temporal limit coincides with the imagined space point; each is only the *posited residuum* of the respective dimension. This spatio-temporal residuum is, in turn, an image of the absolutely self-identical *object*, the ideal substance. Thus to this ideal limit of reflection addressed in II:1.1.2 – the *nexus of immediacy*, space-time point, substantiality – we can now add also the principle of non-contradiction.

The associated law of excluded middle expresses then the completeness of the notion, of a 'substance' which is *precise* and definite. In the narrow scope of *immediacy* it must either be or not-be, and for any equally *immediate* property, it must either be-so or not-be-so. This also expresses the absolute character of negation, as the *reflection* that *it is* isolates absolutely its *object* excluding everything else from the *actuality of reflection*. Indeed, with respect to the *immediacy* of an *act*, an *object* has only two possibilities of either being here or not being here. This narrowing of being to the ideal point constitutes the bivalent *precision* of 'yes' vs. 'no', 'being' vs. 'not-being', and underlies the bivalence of truth and falsehood posited as an equally precise opposition.

193. **2. The actual truth**

The above correspondence theory, arising from the *subject-object dissociation*, applies equally at the level of *actuality*. An *actual complex* may be claimed to underlie the idea of a 'fact', 'state of affairs', as these arise in variants of the correspondence theory. This is the scope within which all indisputable trivialities of the kind "Snow is white", "The cat is on the mat", etc. have their *locus* – both expression and confirmation. Consequently, it is from this sphere that correspondence theorists fetch all their 'obvious' examples.

Although emerging directly from the assumed ontology of *objects*, the truth may easily become a bit more multifacet than the contradiction of 'yes' and 'no'. Negation does not any longer have the absolute and determinate character. It is no longer a mere binary 'yes' or 'no', a bivalent contradiction, but a mulitfacet *complex* of contraries. A thing can be blue or green or red or... Various predicates do not stand to each other in relation of contradiction, yet they may exclude each other. For a property *P*, the absolute negation not-*P* becomes less informative – it

---

<sup>283</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. IV:7

<sup>284</sup>Ibid. IV:4

can be now taken only as an abbreviation for an extensive, perhaps even infinite, alternative of all its contrary properties.<sup>285</sup>

The *horizontal transcendence* of this level is *more of complexes*, and the search for truth keeps multiplying the analysed facts, phenomena and truths about them. Truth of a theory is the issue of this level which, as has been observed, is in general impossible to reduce to the truth of its empirically observable consequences. The question of the degree of truth, or comparison of two theories, becomes of interest. Truth of a theory seems thus to be of a different kind than truth of a single statement. Various approaches, even if severely distinct in conceptual constructions, seem nevertheless to be always variations over the pragmatic concept of truth. For we have seen better – more true? – theories replacing the worse ones. As Newton superseded Aristotle, as Einstein superseded Newton, so progress seems to belong to the notion of (such a) truth. But like every declaration of progress – either it is only a reflection of a prior ideal goal or else creates immediately the question about such a goal. Unless one feels satisfied with a merely sociological account of the fact of *acceptance* of one theory instead of another, one should somewhat account for the primacy of some theories over others. The changeable nature of most formulations and theories accepted as true, combined with the image of absolute and unchangeable truth, lead to the truth as the ideal goal, truth as a regulative idea.<sup>286</sup>

Pierce: “experience shows that the calm and careful consideration of the same distinctly conceived premises (including prejudices) will insure the pronouncement of the same judgment by all men.”<sup>287</sup> It is very, very uncertain if experience really shows anything of this kind. But even if it did, of what concern could it be to me or to you, to any concrete human being? Everything “which will be thought to exist in the final opinion is real, and nothing else.”<sup>288</sup> How long shall we wait to see what is real? The essential questions concerning when such a common pronouncement can be obtained and how could we possibly know that it has been obtained (and won’t be challenged any more) are not only open but also impossible to close. (All forms of eschatology are nothing but calls to the infinite waiting for the historical end of times.) Most unfortunately, however, such totalitarian futurologies forget almost everything. I am sitting now in the sunshine eating a tasty ice-cream. It is extremely real, as real as the heat of the sun, but I doubt anybody will ever, ultimately, on the day of settling the accounts, care to devote any thoughts to this fact. Whether anybody would or not, its reality *hic et nunc* is completely independent from what such a committee of minds might eventually decide.

The *horizontal transcendence* of *actuality* is *more of objects* and *actualities*, and dissatisfaction with the correspondence theories refers to this aspect. First come the trivial questions. Where is the precise distinction between *sign* and *signified*, between meaning and what is meant? Nobody ever gave a rigid, precise definition of it, and some feel justified to conclude that there is therefore no distinction.

There is also a mightier argument with which Berkeley might seem to have discredited even the mere possibility of maintaining correspondence. For “so long men thought [...] that their knowledge was only so far forth real as it was conformable to real things, it follows they *could not be certain* they had any real knowledge at all.”<sup>289</sup> “How given that we ‘cannot get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence’ we nevertheless can have knowledge and talk about an objective public world which is not of our making?”<sup>290</sup> Since we

<sup>285</sup>The logic still retains the laws of non-contradiction and of excluded middle, but its extra-logical character changes by de-emphasizing the role of negation and bringing forth the positive alternative of contraries. As one example (of a multitude of logical systems which formally capture this transition) one can mention logics of finite observations – pointfree topology, theory of locales – which develop this idea by allowing one to define more advanced, lattice-like structures of positive concepts where negation, if at all present, is only of secondary importance.

<sup>286</sup>This is, in fact, inherent in the very questions “How?” and “Why?” asking for an explanation. They are possible only on the prior assumption that things are *not* what they appear, that every encounter has some hidden essence (whether cause, goal or structure). This (we could say, transcendental assumption) turns the discovered solution of one problem into a new problem because it, too, is only an appearance in need of a new explanation. The postulated infinity of the process of explanation is only a reflection of turning this *dissociation* of things from their meaning into the image of absolute, eventually-to-be-reached truth.

<sup>287</sup>C. S. Pierce, *Some consequences of four incapacities*.

<sup>288</sup>C. S. Pierce, *Critical Review of Berkeley’s idealism*. p.82

<sup>289</sup>G. Berkeley, *A Treatise.... §86* [my emph.]

<sup>290</sup>D. Davidson, *A coherence theory of truth and knowledge*. [after R. Rorty, *Pragmatism, Davidson, and truth*. p.335]

indeed “cannot compare belief with non-belief to see if they match,”<sup>291</sup> then let us better reduce truth to some form of its corroboration which, at least in principle, should be possible ‘inside’ our beliefs. Thus, one seems forced to replace truth with the corroboration of truth.<sup>292</sup> A ‘fact’ gets reduced to the criteria of its verification, to its pragmatic utility, to coherence with accepted truths, to a consensus within a community, or what not. The more radical representatives claim that the criteria or characteristics they arrive at actually *are* the concept of truth, while the more sober ones admit that establishing acceptable criteria of truth need not necessarily require or imply the grasp of the concept of truth itself.

The general scheme of the critique is similar, technical and more particular differences notwithstanding: what is a complex theory (not a single statement but a *set* thereof; perhaps just a highly structured description) supposed to correspond to? Also all the ‘entities’ like negations or disjunctions seem to reside only ‘in the mind’; they seem to have no simply *visible* correlates in the ‘reality outside’, the correspondence to which would constitute their truth.<sup>293</sup>

But such a critique (motivating idealistic coherentism or, most generally, immanentism) seems to rest on some all too strong, if not directly wrong, assumption. The assumption amounts to absolutisation of the dualism: the ‘objective public world’ is ‘out there’ and we are trying to reach it from some ‘closed inside’ – not just a duality, presence of two distinct aspects, but an absolute dualism. The world and the mind (or language) are posited as totally incommensurable entities which, by the initial and all underlying assumption *are not* and *can not* come into contact with each other. As this makes the conflict indissoluble, the only thing which remains is to get rid of one of the elements. Mind (or language) must stay, as it is doing all the consideration, so the only element which can go away is the extra-mental, or extra-linguistic reality. This form of idealism has been the background for the coherentism from its beginnings with Bradley, and Joachim.<sup>294</sup>

Of course, you cannot both lock a box and have it open. But who has said that the box is locked, that language does not refer to anything extra-linguistic, that mind is able to relate only to itself? This, as we said, is motivated exclusively by the immanentism, the wish to account for everything in the *visible* categories and, in the present context of truth, to reduce it to the *visible* criteria of its verification. The argument goes like this: we are trying to say that truth is a relation of language to the world but, saying this, we remain ‘within’ the language. But do we really? If I hear that

(iv) “There is a funny guy on the square.”

I convince myself about the truth of this statement by looking out the window – not very linguistic act and certainly not one keeping me ‘inside’ the *actuality* of my solipsistic ‘mind’. We have – we *do have* – the relation between the linguistic expressions and the world (or between S and D), something like:

(v) “There is a funny guy on the square.”  $\xleftarrow{r} \xrightarrow{r}$  a funny guy on the square

Now, applying (i) from §2.2.3.ii and saying that

(vi) “To check if “There is a funny guy on the square” is true I have to look at the square.”

---

<sup>291</sup>R. Rorty, *Pragmatism, Davidson, and truth*. p.334

<sup>292</sup>Deflationism being the most recent and extreme form of such a reduction.

<sup>293</sup>Objections of the same kind, but of more specific forms, concern the ontological assumptions frequently associated with (a variant of) correspondence theory. One would say that true statement corresponds to a fact, or a state of affairs, or something that actually obtains in reality. The problem is to clarify the understanding of such entities – what exactly is a fact? (We won’t follow the lengthy debates whether ‘facts’ are something ‘in the world’ at all. It often seems that attempts to distance oneself from philosophy end in bad philosophy rather than outside it.) If ‘the cat on the mat’ is a fact, then is it also the fact that ‘there is no cat on the mat’? What kind of (objective! external!) fact is that? There seems to be no satisfying answer from the proponents of the ontology of facts, but we would not take it as a successful critique of the correspondence theory. If ‘mental’ vs. ‘outside reality’ has any significant meaning, and any meaning for the theory of truth, then what with the statements like “I love her.”? One may attempt behavioristic reductions but most would probably agree that if it is true then the fact, if any, to which it corresponds is pretty ‘mental’. Certainly, for the one who is making the statement, it is in no way external.

<sup>294</sup>If not with Berkeley. Statements like, e.g., “It is a hard thing to suppose that right deductions from true principles should ever end in consequences which cannot be maintained or made consistent.” [G. Berkeley, *A Treatise.... Introduction §3*] may not announce a full-fledged coherence theory of truth, but they signal the presence of its essential elements.

is indeed a linguistic expression which, in a sense, has turned ‘is true’ into a higher-order predicate, has ‘internalised’ the relation from (v). As Tarski saw, natural language contains its own meta-language and is semantically closed but this is only an impediment in rendering such a language in purely formal terms of a mathematical theory. If one does not aim at such reductions, this fact can be seen exactly as the source of the power which natural language draws from the contact with its ‘outside’, from the fact that, unlike any formal language (or for that matter any language when raised to the level of the only and exclusive object of study), it is not an isolated and *dissociated* entity existing exclusively according to its own definition and norms but, on the contrary, that it is only an aspect of existence involved into its world. Just like the universal possibility of objectifying anything leads to the *objectivistic illusion*, so the universal possibility of such an ‘internalisation’, the mere fact of the relation (v) being expressed linguistically as (vi), may be misused for reducing everything to a mere linguistic expression. But just like the *objectivistic illusion* amounts to forgetting almost the whole sphere of existential meaningfulness, so this reduction is possible only if one forgets that (vi) is only a *reflection* of (v). All such linguistic (or mental) reductions forget exactly this first fact, the original relation (v), and dwell exclusively at its *reflection* (vi), the mere signs over which they do have some power. But truth is not the same as its expression or criteria and “the thing [statement] which is true can be known before its truth is known.”<sup>295</sup>

“The limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to (is the translation of) a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence.”<sup>296</sup> Wrong assumptions lead often to right conclusions, just like right observations can be used to justify wrong conclusions. This very observation seems to underlie two opposite views. On the one hand, language can not be explained by anything extra linguistic, because every such explanation remains within the language. Limit, if there is any, is only an internal limit of the language itself, and it provides the only constraint on its meaning and, eventually, truth. Certainly “reality”, “extra-linguistic reality”, might mean something slightly different if “world”, “life”, “language”, “person” and many other words meant something slightly different from what they do; and the necessity of repeating the sentence may be equated with the nonexistence of perfect synonyms or, more generally, of different sentences with perfectly same meaning.<sup>297</sup> But then there is not much sense in trying to explicate the phrase “the relation of language to extra-linguistic reality” nor, for that matter, any other phrase. Each means only what it means and is irreducible to any other. Language is for speaking, not for speaking about, and the only task left is to catalogue various ways of using various phrases.

On the other hand, although this relation can be named and referred to *in* the language, although its meaning is understood relatively to the understanding of the words it involves and other words – it is not by this token linguistic. There may be little sense in trying to *prove* the limitation of the language using the language, but such a limitation can be *shown*, or perhaps only pointed to. Even if it can not be *precisely* specified within the language, its *presence* can still be *clearly* indicated. This is one of the fundamental functions of language – allowing us to talk about something we cannot say, to point towards something we cannot define *precisely*. This openness is both the strength and the flexibility of natural language. There may be as many relations *r* in (v) as there are linguistic expressions, for each draws the *distinctions* in another way, and words do nothing more (nor less) than that. But even such an unlimited variation does not change the basic fact which it, in fact, assumes: there is a limitation of language and this limitation – the openness onto something more than mere language – is the whole and only power of language.<sup>298</sup> The limitation of the language is that one can hardly explain the meaning of any word or phrase to one who does not understand it, that one cannot explain what “blue”, “taste” or “love” means using the language alone; the limitation of the language is that it cannot exist alone: “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.”<sup>299</sup> This limitation is what underlies the meaning of language; language lives only through the relation which words and sentences carry by being (used as) what they are: *dissociated signs*, epiphanies capable of forgetting their divine origin but

---

<sup>295</sup>J. Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*. I:d3.q4

<sup>296</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*. ??? Or else, extending the schema §2.2.3.ii.(ii): the meaning of “W” is W, as observed, e.g., in M. Dummett, *What is a theory of meaning?*, p.108 [Truth, p.343, footnote 37]

<sup>297</sup>Which is not the case so that Wittgenstein himself discusses counter-examples, e.g., L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* II:20.

<sup>298</sup>Like every genuine strength, it is not owned by the one to whom it is given and can even appear as the source of weakness.

<sup>299</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. I:19

incapable of functioning without it.

196. The issues of truth and of meaning, distinct as they are, are nevertheless very intimately related and the ‘coherentism’ of the one will easily spill over the other. Perhaps the most dramatic variant of coherentism says: “Nothing beyond the text.” Text is absolutised as *the only* carrier and container of meaning and, consequently, if it is still a legitimate idea at all, of truth.<sup>300</sup> Well, not even that – *reading* of the text is the only such carrier. True, unread text would hardly have any meaning. It is pity to have to spend time on trivialities but this is, unfortunately, what such claims result in. Let us imagine two reading scenarios. 1) I have a book, *B*, which I know was written by an author (whom I may know or not, does not matter). I read it and find a lot of interesting stuff, meaning, even truth, in it. 2) In the other scenario, I have exactly the same book *B* only I know that it was written by an ‘intelligent’ machine. Will the ‘truth’, the ‘meaning’ of the book be the same in both readings?

The champions of ‘pure textuality’ would like us to either abstract away the difference or pretend that no difference obtains. However, even if in 2) one were able to understand exactly the same from *B* as in 1) (except, perhaps, how the heck did a machine manage to write *this*?), one would still not be able to attach to it equal value nor, for that matter, equal meaning as in 1). It does not matter if one knows who exactly the author was, how much one possibly knows about him and his time, although these things certainly *may* influence the reading and understanding of the text. But what matters is that one knows *that* the text was written by a human. This, *in and by itself*, makes the text a possible revelation of truth which may be trivial or deep, simple or involved but, in any case, possibly relevant and touching reader’s humanity. Reading is a form of communication with other humans, even if the author is not present and if we want to call it fusion of the horizons of meaning, a process of personal interpretation of an impersonal cultural artifact, or whatever. The fact that the text may involve much more than the author ever intended to put there is as uninteresting as the fact that an accidental slip of a tongue may mean something much more than the one to whom it happened is conscious of – we are still dealing with humans and this is the universal horizon, the eventual reference frame which encircles any text.

And finally, if one got the same book *B* without knowing who, or what, wrote it, its reading would be different from both 1) and 2). Yet, reading it and gradually discovering (yes! in the text only!) some understandable, human meaning, one would create the image of the possible author in terms of 1), in terms of a human who possibly might have written such a text. At least, one would think, bright guy, he says a lot of interesting things, while in the moments where things got a bit dubious one would, as usual, try to ignore them but, perhaps eventually, use them to construct a more refined understanding of the ... message; perhaps, by augmenting what one understood with the dubious parts, perhaps, by ascribing them to the idiosyncrasy of the author. The point is only to repeat, after hermeneutics, that we do treat a text as a possible message worth deciphering, but it is such a message only because it was sent by another human. If it was sent by an ant or an extraterrestrial or extracelestial intelligence, we would be deciphering different – slightly or perhaps vastly, different – thing.

In short, many texts of accidental, merely informative or purely entertaining value might be written by anybody, even machine. But in the moment one assumes, expects, or discovers, some deeper meaning in the text, the text itself becomes a medium of human communication – this is, eventually, the universal context of every text.<sup>301</sup>

197. “Nothing beyond the text” does not limit the attention to any single text but to the ‘textuality as such’; a single text, a book is but a piece of ‘interminable text’, where other texts are the natural reference frame for any given one. It is supposed to mean that there is no ground for assuming

---

<sup>300</sup>The arguments of idealistic flavour, which point to the impossibility of a contact between two dissociated substances, yield one substance which, as also in our case, is the *one* underlied differentiation. The absolutisation of ‘text’, underlying the claims of nothing lying beyond it, amounts to applying a similar argument which, however, can be legitimately applied only to the ultimate ‘substance’.

<sup>301</sup>The *individuality of the particular person* who happened to write the text may, but need not, be of significance. “[A] book is created by another I than that which appears in our habits, in company, in weaknesses. If we want to understand this I, we must try to recreate it in our own depth [...] Man who lives in the same body with a great genius has little to do with the latter, but he is the only person known to his acquaintances; consequently, it is absurd to evaluate a great poet, as Sainte-Beuve does, according to what kind of person he is or what his friends tell about him.” [M. Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve*. The method of Sainte-Beuve’s] Unlike those who, dissatisfied with the petty ego of personal folk-psychology, claim subject’s total superficiality, here dispensing with the former serves only the purpose of emphasizing text’s origin in the deeper layers of *self*, of genuine human subject(ivity).

“anything beyond the signs, anything whose sameness and existence would not be conditioned by the process of naming”<sup>302</sup>. This sounds almost OK – disquietingly so... Let us ignore the tendency (of ones who seem to do nothing but reading) to call everything which involves signs “text”. Still, a sign which is not a sign of *something else* is not a sign! It is, perhaps, a thing, a ‘that’, but what makes it a sign? Only the *distance* between it and its meaning. A more drastic change of language seems to be needed, but what is the point in changing the meaning of the word “sign” to such an extent that it ceases to denote ‘sign’? “*Simulacrum*”, a copy without any original, tries to take care of that, of reducing the *sign* to its purely *actual* dimension and dispensing with anything signified, anything lying beyond its abstract *actuality*.

Most things exist and function completely independently from the process of naming but, indeed, they emerge only in the process of *distinguishing*. The difference might seem to concern only the wording, but it is quite fundamental, as fundamental as that between *actual signs* and the general *distinctions* or else, as that between *actuality* and *presence*. Certainly, *distinctions* arise only gradually and at every stage form a whole system – there is no such thing as a single *distinction* existing ‘in itself’ independently from others. Similarly, what is meant by “love” is related to, perhaps even dependent on, what is meant by “sympathy”, “affection”, “hate”, etc. So, in principle, we can agree that meanings of all words are woven into a total web of the language. But this inter-dependence is only a reflection of the *distinctions* drawn in the matter of experience, between things, feelings, understandings. The plasticity of the *web* of language at best reflects only the plasticity of the experience, like the *actual signs* reflect only *distinctions* drawn also beyond the *horizon of actuality*. But it does not mean that every single, *actual* element of this web has a meaning only by its relation to the rest and is conditioned exclusively by such a relation. On the contrary, unlike a scientific theory (which, according to Quine, is a vast theoretical super-structure only at its outer boundary touching the world of experience and experiments), natural language meets experience at *every* point; the fact that meaning of a particular statement may depend on meanings of other words and statements does not in any way cut this particular statement off from its relation to the extra-linguistic aspect of experience, from the extra-linguistic *distinctions* which it draws and addresses.

‘Text’, any system of *signs*, or language is indeed, as Merleau-Ponty says “life itself, our and thing’s life. [But] not that *language* conquers and appropriates them, for what would be left for saying, if there existed only things said? It is a mistake of semantic philosophies to close language as if it spoke only about itself, because it lives [by] silence; everything we throw to others grew up in this great, mute country which will never leave us.”<sup>303</sup> Clarifying a bit this statement, we would add that the ‘mute country’ may itself be organised by *signs* which themselves need not have linguistic character, but even these are *signs* only by the force of their meaning (eventually, *non-actuality*) which they bring into the horizon of our attention. *Sign* is the paradigm of *actuality*, and *dissociated sign as a sign* the paradigm of *immediacy*. The insistence on pure *textuality* and absence of anything beyond the *signs*, in its attempts to escape from simplified correspondence to *actualities*, falls straight back into the midst of ‘metaphysics of actuality’ which, de-mitologised by the removal of the last element of *transcendence*, becomes pure *immediacy* of a mere sign. The *simulacrum* of *transcendence*, the ‘interminable text’, appears as the ultimate form of *subjectivistic illusion* which sees nothing beyond the *horizon of actuality* but other *actualities*, now not even *objects* but only *signs*. Perhaps, it is only an accident, perhaps, an intellectual sickness: searching for ‘the other’, it finds only itself; in the midst of its search for the ultimate *transcendence*, it *thirsts* for ecstatic unity, and so keeps removing the *transcendence*, narrowing the attention to what, being *immediately given*, deludes *reflection* with the promises of *unity*. And so, “in that outward moving there is frustration or compulsion; a thing most exists not when it takes multiplicity or extension but when it holds to its own being, that is when its movement is inward.”<sup>304 305</sup>

<sup>302</sup>B. Allen, *Truth in Philosophy*. p.106 [after A. Szahaj, *Irony and Love*. p.77]

<sup>303</sup>M. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. Inquiry and intuition; p.131

<sup>304</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:6.1

<sup>305</sup>The simplistic relation to formal logic suggested in §193, footnote 285, can be given much more substance by observing the trend according to which logic is not about formulae but about proofs (which must not be confused with proof-theory! –Roughly, proof-theory studies derivations of valid formulae, while the genuine concern with proofs addresses only their internal mechanisms and structures). The work, and general philosophy, of Jean-Yves Girard may serve as an excellent example of the attempt to carry out the programme quite ambitious and admirable when judged by the strictly scientific standards: get rid of the traditional syntax-semantics schizophrenia, explain the meaning of the (syntactic) entities by the role they play in proofs, internalise meta-considerations by requiring

### 3. Truth of totality

The objectivistic illusion underlying simplistic versions of correspondence theories, is likewise manifest as subjectivistic illusion in coherentism: first, in the fact that the whole became a mere ‘text’, a collection of mere actualities, signs; and then, in the usual multiplication of facts and truths (here, signs) as one tries to embrace the whole; the whole which refuses to appear as anything more than a totality. Coherence (sometimes reduced to mere logical consistency) is a desired property of such a totality, being an indication of the possibility that one has actually grasped the whole. The main problem we have with pictures like that of Pierce’s truth is that the whole is simply a totality; perhaps, well organised and structured but still only a totality. Moreover, it extends beyond any reasonable limits of inquiry – this is why the truth about it must be postponed until indefinite future, for it will take infinity of time to collect and study the infinite totality of facts, problems and phenomena and to arrive at a consensus concerning it. As most regulative ideas and ideal limits, it betrays the attempt to capture something higher in terms of a totality of lower elements. Totality is a project of mineness and the corresponding mode of horizontal transcendence, the not-mine, has the particularly significant modification: the others. Focusing on this aspect of transcendence leads to replacing the more or less conceptual coherence with the social consensus.

The eventual context of all my considerations is the context of my life. This, however, is never ended totality where there seems to be no internal coherence except this “which it happened to obtain at the last turn of hermeneutical circle.”<sup>306</sup> Any possible transcendence announced by signs is attempted removed, so that even the system of signs, the ever escaping simulacrum of the ‘interminable text’, gives place to the arbitrariness of mineness. Indeed, where is the possible distinction between mere opinion and knowledge, between private idiosyncrasy and general validity? Nobody ever gave a precise, rigid definition of it. So . . . there is no distinction, at least, none possible to maintain.

But we do not want to be swallowed up by the arbitrariness of ‘subjectivity’. Beyond me there are others, the whole community, perhaps, tradition. The sociological aspect appears (albeit in as yet limited and not aggressive form) already with Pierce since, for some reason, the eventual usefulness of an opinion cannot be judged by its own standards, it requires a consensus. “And the catholic consent which constitutes the truth is by no means to be limited to men in this earthly life or to the human race, but extends to the whole communion of minds to which we belong, including some probably whose senses are very different from ours, so that in that consent no predication of a sensible quality can enter, except as an admission that so certain sorts of senses are affected.”<sup>307</sup> Indeed, one may try to pay the due respect to the transcendent character of truth, to overcome subjectivism or even solipsism by appeals to a community, by blurring the distinction between the ‘objective’ and the ‘inter-subjective’. This way of ‘taking care of’ the transcendence of not-mine, characterising the sociological invasion of philosophy, amounts really to its removal and leaves, eventually, only a community of writing and speaking, a community of ‘narratives’. Then there seems to be only one goal: let’s interact, talk and “keep conversation going”. Strangely enough, one drags in all kind of extra-conversational, extra-textual things like ethics, society, culture, solidarity... So, after all, does not conversation suffice? It seems it does not. For pragmatical mind, conversation is only means of action, and a good conversation brings in powerful narratives, effective metaphors. But appeals to descriptions and metaphors which simply work, which are effective, which serve the purpose seem rather empty if keeping the conversation going is the goal. (Sure, it is not the goal because there is no such thing as the goal. One is only pressed by ‘wrong language game’ to say what the point possibly might be.) But even the strictest codes of a court etiquette, enabling one to spend time conversing without saying anything, had always left opening for actually saying something. Reducing everything to a game of simulacra one would still like to escape the resulting arbitrariness, that is, to retain the possibility of saying

---

and utilising reflection principle (in the technical sense of converting higher-order statements into equivalent first-order ones). All these goals of pure logic can be seen as a reflection of the more general, philosophical immanentism discussed above. With respect to the last point, in J.-Y. Girard, *Locus Solum: From the Rules of Logic to the Logic of Rules*, we even find the quote from Wittgenstein: “I may play Chess according to certain rules. But I may also invent a game where I play with the rules themselves. The pieces of the game are then the rules of chess and the rules of the game are, say, the rules of logic. In this case, I have *yet another game*, not a metagame.” [L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*.]

<sup>306</sup>R. Rorty, *The Pragmatist’s Progress*. [after A. Szahaj, *Irony and Love*. p.72]

<sup>307</sup>C. S. Pierce, *Critical Review of Berkeley’s idealism*. p.83

something. And so one needs something – tolerance, solidarity, or other thing – which sounds sufficiently convincing ‘in itself’. But is it convincing? Sure, because “decent fellows like us” do accept such values. But what, if I am not one of the conversational club, if I am not a decent guy and do not accept such values? I guess, I am not part of the game, I am not admitted to the conversation. But then, since one talks about ‘solidarity’ and ‘tolerance’, of constant extension of the horizon of ‘we’, so please, extend it, perhaps even to the guys who bomb one’s home town. This, after all, too, is a description, a conversational metaphor.

There is certainly an element of truth in it, consensus, just like coherence, need not exclude truth and it is often important to achieve an agreement with others which means, to accept the same truths, with respect to the same horizon of *distinctions*. One can also think of more extreme cases where all the *distinctions* of relevance are *only* those agreed upon by the community – then the criterion of truth will become conformance to them. This could remind a bit too much of a petty-bourgeois mentality but this, or the general smell of ethnocentrism around the consensus theories, can always be dissipated by positing some more ideal communities like the one just seen in Pierce, or a bit more limited community of rational discourse, or other inventions of the kind.

199.

Replacing ‘truth’ by ‘inter-subjectivity’, consensus theory reduces possible truth to that about which all might reach a consensus, and that is close to nothing. Failing to escape *my* subjectivity in the sphere of social subjectivity, failing to rest satisfied with the inaccessible ideal limits, one invents eventually the ideal of consensus allowing everybody run his own business, the ideal of plurality and non-conformism. This is only a slight variation on the old theme of pragmatic ethics in a ‘pluralistic universe’ taken over by the recent masters of manifold and variety. Having lost, in the plurality of disparate opinions, any means of saying that something is more important, more valuable, higher, deeper or more true than something else, and thus of saying what possibly might be a meaningful goal for which things should ‘work’, the only possibility left is to embrace everything. One even imagines systems (political, cultural) allowing for non-conformism. (Positive, as the intentions behind such, as behind most other utopias, can be, the result reflects only the origin: the absolutisation of atomism on the social scale, only claimed to have positive value.) However, just like a sign which does not signify is not a *sign*, so a system open for everything is not any system but ... a lack thereof. Also, non-conformism which is allowed as an option, as if calculated into the system, is not any longer non-conformism. A system allowing non-conformism, by this very token, abolishes its possibility. One may, perhaps, keep conversation going. But everyone should know the situations where this becomes a mere gesture of unbearable politeness, because what the other is saying, no matter how intelligent and well-argued, is simply nonsense. Universal pluralism and tolerance would have one main consequence – total de-individualisation and indolence, uniformity, the exact opposite of the intended variety... Discourse in such a setting would, too, cease to have meaning, because where everything is allowed, where all goals are equally good, where everything is acceptable, there is no need to argue (not to say fight) for anything. When everybody is entitled to be heard, eventually, nobody bothers to listen. Sure, these are only idealisations, ‘regulative ideas’ since no such thing can ever happen. Yet, there are some who speak as if they wanted them to happen...

No matter how explicitly one admits ethnocentric assumptions, one remains ethnocentric which, 200. eventually, means arbitrarily self-satisfied. And if anything at all might possibly be meant by “truth” it can not stand all too much arbitrariness. The convenient words one tries to invoke – “solidarity”, “universality”, “communicability”, “tolerance” – point towards something which one believes would cure this arbitrariness, something ... fundamentally human. Ethics seem to replace truth; not in the Kantian way, though, as complementing the project of knowledge of appearances, but simply replacing it. Ethics, moreover, devoid of any truth, that is an arbitrary ‘ought’ to mere worship of manifold and plurality, growth and diversification, increase ... The popular medical term for that is “cancer”. Truth is only what works, and so is good. Powerful metaphors, powerful narratives ... But what makes a metaphor, a narration *powerful*? What is it that makes some language “strike also the next generation as inevitable”<sup>308</sup>? Communism was once a powerful narrative, many next generations were struck by it as inevitable. And its prolific, powerful consequences... Yet its power was not very different from – in fact, was founded in – its falsehood. Is it so that people somewhat intuit that this and not that narrative can be made effective, used

<sup>308</sup>R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. I:2;p.29

to change things? Change to the better, perhaps? These are, of course, ‘wrong questions’, which assume that there is some ‘what’ behind the actual event of a narrative happening to be powerful. It just happens, and so does truth. So let it happen in most possibly prolific ways, with no interference or persecution of its possible happenings. (Why such a proliferation is to be any better than unification is still not clear but, we might guess, one wants to be politically correct while, on the other hand, being deadly afraid of boredom and seeing nothing but distractions to help against, if not to cure it.)

Fear of being persecuted can be equally good means of coercion as actual persecution. But if we need to exclude persecution to upgrade a mere consensus, or plurality and non-conformism, or else the power of a narrative, or whatever comes next, to the level of truth, why not dispense with all these concepts which are being upgraded and say simply that it is enough not to persecute to get the truth? “The truth is non-persecution.” Well, it does not sound bad, does it? Why not? Because it again touches something which one wants to recognise as humanly correct, not to say true. Even if truth is something that, in principle, everybody could recognise, it does not mean that it is something everybody actually recognises. And it is likewise with falsehood. The servility of praising something that ‘strikes also the next generation as inevitable’ is as astonishing as the depersonalisation and de-individualisation it implies. It is an invitation (the less intended, the worse) to following the mob psychology, like that which forced the victims of Marxism (in all its variants) to follow the ‘development’ proclaimed inevitable for all future generations.

The consensus theories, this absolutised sociologism, reflect the mentality of a stock market and agents of public relations, or else the wishes of the ministries of propaganda. No doubt, there are sociological dimensions and situations in which mob’s convictions are sufficient for action or, as is usually the case, mass hysteria. Thirst for *visible* criteria ends typically with a conflation of the criteria with the things they were only supposed to be criteria of. But have we not seen enough lies which, repeated sufficiently many times, refused to become truths. ‘Inter-subjectivity’, no matter how pluralistic, how total or totalitarian, is still a *subjectivity*, something which can not constitute truth but only, and only at best, discover it.<sup>309</sup>

#### 201. 4. *The absolute truth*

“Truth in its essential nature is that systematic coherence which is the character of a significant whole. A ‘significant whole’ is an organised individual experience, self-fulfilling and self-fulfilled.”<sup>310</sup> Translating it into our language, the ‘significant whole’ is the *existence* and the ‘systematic coherence’ its *unity*. But *this unity* is not consistency; it is the original fact of *existence founding* the possibility of any *actually* consistent whole and unity.

Recalling again our figure (I:\$167, p.91), as we move up the circle (above its horizontal diameter), there is not *more distinctions*, in fact, there are less, or if there are more, they become dense beyond the limit of recognition. It is the sphere where the clue is not to include *more* heterogeneous ‘facts’ into a unifying theory but rather to understand that ‘less is more’, that the same *eternal* things penetrate all variety of *actualities*. The truth addressing the level of *invisibles* is rather contained in simple words of wisdom than in complex arguments of smartness. For “many-branched and

---

<sup>309</sup>If we were to draw a free association to some aspects of formal logic, we would point here to still further limitation of negation’s omnipotence by renunciation of the law of excluded middle. Three-valued or, generally, many-valued logics are examples of that. (We are not discussing here technical intricacies. The fact that, for instance, three-valued logic can be formally represented by introducing the meta-predicate of validity (or truth), within two-valued logic certainly does not concern us here.) As often happened in the history of mathematical logic, the beginnings go back to philosophy, indeed, to Aristotle’s syllogisms and future contingents. A third logical value was introduced by Łukasiewicz for denoting the ‘unknown’ truth-value of statements referring to future contingents.

The diminution of the absolute role of negation reflects the recognition of some form of boundedness of our truth-gaining capacities, perhaps even genuine incompleteness of *our* knowledge. In spite of all Leibnizean constructions of complete notions of substances which contain all future events which will happen to them, *we* do not know if “there will be a sea-battle tomorrow”. Already Arnauld pointed out to Leibniz that we should better concern ourselves with the ways *we* can know things, rather than with the ways God might know them. The logics with non-contradiction principle and law of excluded middle, if taken as more than mere logics, reflect rather God’s than our view of the universe. Logics renouncing the excluded middle are motivated by incompleteness of *our* knowledge, by the simple fact that *I* may not know whether *P* or not-*P* is (going to become) true. (The (in)completeness of knowledge being modeled is not to be confused with the (in)completeness of the logical system itself.) Besides many-valued logics, one can mention here intuitionistic logic, built precisely around the idea of knowledge which remains incomplete and limited to the facts which can be positively constructed, as well as, fuzzy logics which try to model vagueness of concepts. Linear logic of Girard is a completely different example where incompleteness of the modeled system corresponds rather to the boundedness of resources consumed during the reasoning process.

<sup>310</sup>H. H. Joachim, *The Nature of Truth*. §26 [after S. Blackburn and K. Simmons, eds., *Truth*. p.50]

endless are the thoughts of the man who lacks determination [while] the follower of this path has one thought, and this is the End of his determination.”<sup>311</sup>

Truth, like every *trace*, reaches eventually to the *unity* which is its *absolute aspect*, the unchangeable *one*, common to all who know it and to those who do not. But “[t]hough the truth is common, the many live as if they had a wisdom of their own.”<sup>312</sup> Manifestations of *unity* need not and do not conform to the *visible* rules of agreement between the particulars which, usually, only unknowingly and involuntarily happen to manifest the same eternal truth. The *absolute* truth does not embrace all the lower, *visible* ones – it abolishes them. The *distance* separating the *actual signs* from their meaning is here so remote, that no *visible* rules can any longer govern the expressions of truth.

The *unity* of one being certainly admits contradictions. Viewing this *unity* in its temporal aspect, there is nothing contradictory in being, at one time *P* and, at another time, not-*P*. But much more can be said. *I* can, at the same time, both like and dislike a person. And it is not of much use to say that then *I* like and dislike distinct properties of the person, because persons are not *complexes* of properties but individual beings. Sure, *I* can like the person for ‘being x’ and dislike for ‘being y’. But *I* can also, simultaneously, both love and not-love the person, the whole person. “I hate her and I love her. Why I do so I don’t know./It’s just the way I feel, that’s all, and it’s tearing me in two.”<sup>313</sup> *I* can have a *vague* feeling about something which, when attempting to specify it, results in saying that it is both pleasing and displeasing. This may be, of course, blamed merely on the inadequacy of the language to express the actual feelings. But blaming it for such an ‘inadequacy’, one has already assumed that the feelings must be prone to a *precise* description in terms of *immediacy*, that is, non-contradiction. Higher things seldom are prone to such descriptions and, indeed, their descriptions may often be most adequate by using contradictory predicates. Coming to terms with such higher aspects of one’s life, it is necessary to realise that simple yes-no questions may have no answers. One sitting there and trying desperately to figure out “Do I love her or not? Do I or do I not?...” is probably still in his adolescence, trying to capture the accumulated tension of *vagueness* and *clarity* in the categories of recently developed *precision* and *reflective visibility*. When, eventually, some *action* must be undertaken, one may have to bring everything down to the *actual* choice between yes and no: “Shall I invite her for a dinner or not?” But it is a question about *actual* course of action where, indeed, contradictions may be intolerable.<sup>314</sup>

The eventual *transcendence* is *nothingness*, the lack or the empty set of *distinctions*, so the 202. only *signs* true with respect to it are those which mean *nothing*,  $m(S) = \emptyset$ , “nothingness”, “one” or just ...silence. Let us notice in passing that a *sign* meaning *nothingness* is very different

<sup>311</sup> *The Bhagavad-Gita*. II:41

<sup>312</sup> Heraclitus DK 22B2 [Instead of “truth”, the fragment has “logos”.]

<sup>313</sup> Catullus *Odi et Amo*, 60

<sup>314</sup> The logical aspect of this level of truth takes the final step in decreasing the role of negation by renouncing also the law of non-contradiction, admitting states (or theories) with both *P* and not-*P*. (It is very doubtful or, in any case, quite disputable whether such things are still logics and if they are good for anything at all. But we are not concerned with the value, nor even comparison, of logical systems which we are observing here from an external and un-mathematical point.) There may be various *actual* reasons for that. One, exemplified in non-monotonic logics, is the wish to model development of states of belief. At some point, one may simply not know which of the two holds. This can be now taken not so strictly as in intuitionistic logic (which simply denies the law of excluded middle) but as saying that both are possible and one may be allowed to draw conclusion from the one and the other. This is a weak form of para-consistent logic where one would simply allow an agent to ‘know’, ‘believe’, ‘be in a state’ including both *P* and not-*P*. Admitting such states in a stronger sense may be motivated by examples of, typically, scientific theories, which involve or entail contradictions, but which are not meaningless. This may be also a way of approaching some paradoxes, like liar paradox, which seem to be ‘dialetheias’, ‘true contradictions’, since they can be understood as being simultaneously both true and false. In any case, the main consequence of admitting (apparent or real) contradictions is that one has to prevent the possibility of obtaining from them all possible propositions (as would be the case in classical logic), which would again equate such states with something meaningless.

Most generally, such logics relativise the meaning negation. In non-adjunctive system of Jaśkowski’s discourse logic, negation applies to the statements of the same interlocutor but not to those of others; in non-truth-functional system of da Costa, the value of not-*P* is completely independent from the value of *P*; in relevant logic, pioneered by Anderson and Belnap, negation becomes a purely intentional operation, so that *P* and not-*P* are interpreted in different structures. This can be related to the recognition that concepts are not precise but vague and hence negation does not posit an absolute alternative but remains itself, so to say, underdetermined. Going in this direction, para-consistency might approach fuzzy or many-valued logics which, indeed, can be used for modeling para-consistency as proposed, e.g., by Asenjo.

from a *sign* meaning nothing, or from the lack of *sign*: silence meaning *nothingness*, *Stille und Ewigkeit*, is different from silence which does not mean anything or, as the case may be, is only tensely expecting its own termination waiting for somebody to say something.<sup>315</sup> Also (and now we see again the inadequacy of simplistic pseudo-mathematisations like  $\subseteq$  in (iii)), as intentions belong to meanings, there is a fundamental difference between a *sign* which both intends and means *nothingness*, and one which, intending something, means nothing, between a *koan* and an overlooked contradiction.

The *absolute* truth is *that*: *that* there is, or else, *that* there is truth. And what is *that*? *Nothing*, that which makes it impossible for any person or any community to *arbitrarily* decide what is true. At the same time, *that* makes it possible to oppose any particular ‘truth’ which *actuality* might attempt to *posit* as the truth, as the *absolute* truth. Falsehood with respect to the *nothingness* is not its plain negation, something; it is not anything specifically distinguished as such, because no particular thing, no *distinction* opposes the *absoluteness* of *indistinct*. *Indistinct* remains untouched above the whole world, above all *distinctions* and falsehood with respect to *that* amounts to projecting some *distinctions* into the *indistinct*. *Absolute* falsehood is something particular *only when* predicated about the *absolute* or, what comes quickly out of it, *absoluteness* predicated about anything relative – in short, an *idol*.

203. *Idolatry* divides because, *positing* something relative as *absolute*, it alienates from *that* which is one; trying to make it *visible*, it not only veils but also falsifies it. Relativity means limited scope and validity, and *positing* it as *absolute* sets one against all that contradicts this *absoluteness*, namely, all that falls outside its scope. And so, he that tries to unify under some *visible* slogans, ends up dividing, “he that gathereth not [in truth] scattereth abroad.”<sup>316</sup> The scattered pieces, the pieces left outside the scope of the *actual* unity remain, however, as the seeds of constant restlessness, disquieting reminders of the refusal and exclusion. And “[t]he stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”<sup>317</sup> The new building, to last, must not be just a rearrangement of the old pieces including, in addition, a few pieces previously excluded. It is raised only by accepting relativity of the relative and ceasing to search for the *absolute* among the *visible* pieces.

Truth is the way of – and, as a *trace of transcendence*, a norm, a call to – *unity*, to keeping heaven and earth together. It is the *transcendent unity* and as such a contra-distinction to the falsehood of the *actuality* taken as *absolute*. It is the element of *transcending* – beyond *actuality* – which establishes it primarily as the *call to unity*, as the *norm* of preserving the *unity*. Following this norm unites, but not necessarily in any trivial sense of a conceptual agreement – it unites primarily in a complete disagreement, *above* and as if in spite of any *actual* conflict.<sup>318</sup> It is not a trivial acceptance, which often means just absolutisation, of all the differences. It is rather an admittance that these differences are only of relative value, are manifestations of something which, remaining *invisible*, unites. The image of truth as an absolute either-or, not admitting any degrees and compelling everybody to unconditional acceptance, as both *absolute* and *visible*, is a fallen angel reminding of the lost paradise. “The urge to possess absolutely *only certainties* is a residual religious drive, and nothing more.”<sup>319</sup> It is the *trace* of the highest aspect of *absolute* truth which, however, concerns only the *absolute*. Among the relativity of *actual* facts, truth can not always conform to such standards. Any demands for it to *actually* and *visibly* unify and gather are only ways of reducing its meaning and power. For *absolute* truth is not relative to any particular aspects of our *actual* world and life, but exercises its power *above*, as the ultimate norm, ever reminding us about the relativity and insignificance of whatever we manage to capture under our *actual* look and grasp. Reducing it to any *visible* norms and criteria falsifies its character of being exactly the *absolute* norm which remains valid when all *actual* criteria have failed or been

---

<sup>315</sup>Thus, on the one hand, “Silence alone is Thy praise.” [Ps. LXV:2; St. Jerome’s translation] But not all silence is praise, for there is also silence of emptiness, of lack turned into disappointment: “Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.” [Ps. XCIV:17]

<sup>316</sup>Matt. XII:30/Lk.XI:23

<sup>317</sup>Ps. CXVIII:22

<sup>318</sup>“What opposes unites, and the finest attunement stems from things bearing in opposite directions, and all things come about by strife. – Grasps: things whole and not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one.” [Heraclitus DK 22B8-B10.] We are, of course, very far from any pantheistic interpretations of the slightly unlucky phrase opening the last sentence.

<sup>319</sup>F. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. 16

violated.

Every *actuality* is a sign which may be true or not with respect to the *absolute*. In the deepest sense life, viewed as a constant confrontation of actuality with transcendence, can be true. To live in truth is to live in conformance to the origin, in the unity above visible dispersion; to use Luria's inventive imagery, to gather the dispersed pieces; in the constant process of restoration, «*tiggun*», to keep repairing the divine vessels broken in the earlier stage of dispersion, «*shevirat ha-kelim*». <sup>320</sup> Successful *tiggun* concerns the whole hierarchy of Being, unifies all its levels around the highest truth; not in any coherent theory but in the full recognition of the relative differences, even incommensurability, of lower distinctions, whose possible consistency and compatibility never sums up to the ultimate unity. The signs can be true in different degree, depending on the level they address. An *idol* is hardly ever a complete lie, it can be promoted to the special status precisely because it harbours some truth; but the status of the *absolute* is undeserved because it is only relative truth. I saw once a professor (of philosophy!) conducting a proof in first-order logic for the statement that God who is both omnipotent and good cannot possibly exist. Formally, the proof was correct and His Professorship seemed very pleased with himself – he almost seemed to believe that he actually proved anything of interest. But correctness, and truth, with respect to the level of mathematical immediacy need not reflect any truth with respect to deeper perception and understanding of the world. One can be both right and wrong at the same time.<sup>321</sup> Truth of most statements terminates at the level which they address, and in this very fact there hides an additional aspect of truth, of knowing and respecting the limits. But there are also other modes of speaking. The similes, like many biblical stories, may be true at several levels – not because they can be interpreted in various ways but because their plain meaning extends to and merges with the senses at deeper and deeper levels. This is the rare unity of wisdom which is able to embrace the truth of whole human being in the actuality of one image, in a few simple signs.

In the deepest sense, a life can be true, a life which is lived in conformance to the origin. This does not in any way assume any 'essence of human nature', but it does suggest that there are some fundamental aspects of the existential situation which, deserving respect and recognition, can be ignored and forgotten. (We will address them in Book III.) Truth in the strictest, metaphysical sense of an access to the unchangeable reality applies only to the deepest sphere of life. Simply because this sphere of ultimately invisible foundation, and its relations to the lower sphere of visibility, is the only constant aspect of human experience and history. "Our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent times."<sup>322</sup> But the fact that they 'have been able to preserve themselves' is not an accident of the historical development prone to pragmatic verification. They were able to preserve themselves only because they reflect the deepest aspects of human situation. The lower aspects and, eventually, concepts, ideas and theories are certainly prone to steady re-evaluation. But this in no way affects the truth concerning the ultimate reality of our being. This truth needs no arguments and demonstrations, it is above all truths, unaffected by their passage and indefeasible by their pretensions, waiting in its eternal silence until the skirmishes which future times fight against the past fall silent too. "We have incapacity of proof, insurmountable by all dogmatism. We have an idea of truth, invincible to all scepticism."<sup>323</sup> This truth is what it always has been and every human being can only attempt to live it or, as the case may be, fail to do so. To dissolve the *absolute* in the relativity of visible truths is to falsify it, and its unmistakable sign is ascription of absoluteness to some relative truth. This is the only absolute untruth the history of human life has ever seen.

\* \* \*

Let us summarise briefly. The particular ways in which particular judgments or theories are checked vary tremendously leaving hardly any universal criteria to stick to. This, however, does

<sup>320</sup>The same intuitions seem to underlie the Orphic myth of Zagreus-Dionysus' rebirth – return to the original unity – from the pieces scattered in the souls of all the people.

<sup>321</sup>In a particular case, it may be hard to say if rigidity is an expression of pride, of insecurity, or of both, but it is easy to notice that one can be both intelligent and stupid. Such an observation might be taken only as a preliminary to the observation 'the smarter, the more stupid' from II:§51.

<sup>322</sup>W. James, *Pragmatism*. p.83 [after G. Cotkin, *William James: Public Philosopher*. p.165]

<sup>323</sup>B. Pascal, *Pensées*. VI:395

not mean that I can judge as I please, and all theories of truth try, in one way or another, to account for the absence of such arbitrariness. Arbitrariness is the pure *immediacy*, the pure subjectivity of mere *hic et nunc* which, dissociated from all the rest, seems to offer its contents in a wild spontaneity. Arbitrariness is pure immanentism, dissociation of *immediacy* from its context, surroundings and, eventually, origin. To account for non-arbitrariness of truth one does, willingly or not, point to some form of *transcendence*: ‘correspondence’ to externality, ‘coherence’ to the *more* of the context, ‘consensus’ to the *non-mineness* of other humans or culture, and the last one (which does not have any established name nor any strictly philosophical tradition) to the revelation of *invisibles* and silence of the origin.

The tradition correcting the views which bring truth all too closely to subjectivity observes that denying any sphere of *transcendence*, one denies also the meaning of the word “truth”. Such a denial indeed solves all the problems in one stroke: there is nothing to talk about. There may be some dose of positive intentions behind such claims. But the word itself refuses irresponsibly to die and, moreover, it refuses even to be reduced to any other word. Perhaps, we are playing our ‘language game’ a bit wrongly? A bit irresponsibly? A bit too ecstatically? A bit too immanently?

Yet, this tradition (of correspondence theories, or realism) encounters the problem of dualistic ontology which it can neither ignore nor solve. To some extent, we follow the opposing tradition (of immanentism, or idealism), namely, to the extent that every ‘what’ is relative to (our) *distinguishing*. In the world of *distinctions*, there is no strict dualism: the meanings of our *signs* and the *distinctions* with respect to which their truth is constituted are essentially of the same kind: they are both *distinctions* in the same *indistinct*. Almost as Frege demanded of a correspondence that it “can only be perfect if the corresponding things coincide and are, therefore, not distinct things at all.”<sup>324</sup>

There is, however, a difference between the two in that the *actual distinctions* of mere *signs* can merge into the *non-actual* ones. The immanentism of relativity goes along with the fundamental importance of *transcendence*, of *non-actuality* serving as the measure and corrective of the *immanent signs*. We disagree completely with any reductionistic attempts, with any kind of verificationism<sup>325</sup> or utilitarianism<sup>326</sup> reducing truth to some *visible*, preferably observable if not measurable elements of experience. If one wants to insist that “only what serves life is true”, then one must also add that “only truth serves life”, if “truth is what it is expedient to believe in” then also “what is *really* true it is good to believe and evil to reject.”<sup>327</sup> Constructing truth as some ideal limit terminating inquiry, as a regulative idea extending gradually its actual scope, arises from the same immanentism, albeit in an attempt to take care of the transcendent aspect as well, adding it, as if at the ideal terminus of interminable sequence. By this addition it really inverts the immanentism and makes the reduction especially well visible: for now no actual, visible and temporal sign can be (considered) true.

We get closer to the correspondence theories observing that if truth gets reduced to any criterion then we have really dispensed with the very idea of truth which is exactly the last norm remaining when all other criteria have been violated. In particular, along with all criteriology, there disappears also what for it appears as a big problem: the truths which might remain forever unknown.<sup>328</sup> Taking *D* (in our ‘definition’ §187.(iii)) to be ‘the number of brontosauruses that ever

<sup>324</sup>G. Frege, *The thought: a logical inquiry*. p.86. Or, as already Plotinus observed, albeit with a much more profound reference to human reality, only with respect to the intellectual realm: “the object known must be identical with the knowing act [or agent], the Intellectual-Principle, therefore, identical with the Intellectual Realm. And in fact, if this identity does not exist, neither does truth” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:3.5]

<sup>325</sup>Late Wittgenstein’s practice seems to have strong pragmatic roots, and verificationism is a recurring theme. “Rather, we must first determine the role of deciding for or against a proposition. [...] Really ‘The proposition is either true or false’ only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it.” [L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. §198, §200]

<sup>326</sup>We are tempted to call so the pragmatic (mis)understanding of truth. It has both aspects of verificationism “Truth *ante rem* means only *verifiability* [...]” [W. James, *Pragmatism’s conception of truth*. p.61] and utilitarianism, according to which truth “is distinguished from falsehood simply by this, that if acted on it should, on full consideration, carry us to the point we aim at and not astray” [C. S. Pierce, *The fixation of belief*. 5] Unfortunately, as already Russell pointed out, it is not only highly problematic to specify the ‘point we aim at’; the criterion of eventual ‘betterness’ or usefulness is often useless if one were to use it for determining truth – it is much easier to ascertain that “snow is white” than to figure out what might be the use of such a truth.

<sup>327</sup>C. S. Pierce, *Critical Review of Berkeley’s idealism*. [my emph., p.87]

<sup>328</sup>Certainly, our ontology of relativity to existence, makes also all truths, except the one, disappear when no existence is left. But it does not imply that all the truths a particular existence discovers during its life time disappear when this existence dies.

lived', then we may meaningfully say that the sentence "The number of brontosauruses that ever lived is precisely 75,278" is true (or false) with respect to *D*, although we will never know which one it is.

We follow the correspondence theory in that truth expresses an agreement: between the *immanence* of a sign and the *transcendence* where its *meaning* resides. But this agreement is not between two incommensurable elements. Truth is a *trace of transcendence*, of the fact that, eventually, *I am not the master*. But this ultimate *confrontation* is lived as the *unity of actual and non-actual*, of the *distinctions* which reside on both sides of the boundary of *actuality*. We do not live in two incommensurable worlds of mental and external affairs – we live in one and the same world emerging through the *distinctions* relative to our *existence*, which we draw and recognise in the *indistinct*.

Besides trying to balance the merits of these two views we have, of course, emphasized that truth depends on the level addressed by the *signs*. The relevant aspect of *transcendence* is, except for the highest level, the *horizontal transcendence* corresponding to the level of things addressed by the statements (theories, views) which one wants to judge with respect to their truth or untruth.<sup>329</sup> And so, even if we grant some plausibility at the level at which the respective theories operate, they hardly retain it with respect to the lower, or higher levels. The kind of theory of truth one is able to propose depends primarily on the kind of things addressed, because things of different levels are involved in different forms of *transcendence*.

Thus truth borrows its specific character from the things addressed but it is all the time a trace of the *original confrontation*. "Thus veritable truth is not accordance with an external; it is self-accordance; it affirms and is nothing other than itself and is nothing other; it is at once existence and self-affirmation."<sup>330</sup> From this *original foundation* it borrows the expectations of addressing something – and hence itself being – unchangeable, one and shared by all. But as long as it is concerned with relative beings, the truth itself can only be relative; only what concerns the *absolute* can be *absolutely* true. Relativity of truth means only relativity of all possible 'whats', of the addressed *distinctions*. But given the addressed subject-matter or situation, the truth with respect to this relative context can be definite and 'absolute' – the *actual signs* can conform fully to the addressed *distinctions*, the relation between *S* and *D*, as indicated in (iii), is perhaps the matter of degree but not of any relativity. Above all relative 'whats', the *absolute* truth is only the ultimate *that*, the reminder that there is (truth) which can be expressed and manifested but never captured and exhausted by any *actuality*. The lower need not mimic the higher, need not attempt any similarity, for this is impossible. But it must not forget the higher either, for then correct observations may turn into false ideas, true propositions may turn into false theories, correct arguments into wrong causes and series of right decisions into disastrous mystifications. Truth, let us say, is a *concrete participation* in the *traces of transcendence*, and as there are different forms and levels of *transcendence*, so truth of a lower level may turn out to be a falsehood of a higher one. Truths which stop short of the *absolute* remain relative, and this is a common lot. But if they forget it, if they forget the *absolute*, they start imperceptibly to claim absoluteness for themselves and thus turn into falsehoods. "Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness."<sup>331</sup>

## 2.3 As below, so above

The impression might have accumulated that relations between the levels concern only *founding* the lower by the higher ones. This is, indeed, the fundamental relation but not the only one. As we have noticed contrasting *invisibles* and 'forms' in 1.4.2.iii, and then discussing memory in §§153.ff, there is also a flow bottom-up, in which *actualities* may influence the *invisible distinctions*

<sup>329</sup>"It is hot" is confronted merely with the immediacy of the sensation; "There is a cat on the mat" will be confronted with the *actual facts* (as will be "There is no cat on the mat!"); an elaborate theory will be confronted with observations of its predictable consequences, with the requirements of internal consistency and, perhaps, of conformance or commensurability with other accepted theories, etc.; the general ideas, like "Man is what he leaves behind him", will be confronted with other, similarly general ideas, with the personality of one who pronounces them, with the pronouncements of others and, eventually, with the personal intuitions and convictions.

<sup>330</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.2

<sup>331</sup>Lk. XI:34-35/Mt. VI:22-23

and contribute to formation of more *virtual nexuses*.

207. Acts are limited to the *horizon of actuality* in that the unity of a single act is consummated within this horizon, with the *equipollent aspects* of the *actual object* and *actual subject*. But, of course, we do not act in a completely spontaneous, that is, *dissociated* and meaningless way. Every act has a rest, is anchored in our being. The unity of a complex of acts, of an *action* or even *activity* is constituted not by their *objects* (they may vary and change) but by their ... well, objectives, or better, motives, eventually, *inspirations*. An *object* of an act follows (is chosen by) the purpose of the *action*; the purpose of the *action* follows the motive of the *activity*; and motives, often life-long motivations and traits, are in turn expressions of the *inspirations*.

Thus, like every *actual experience*, an act is a cut through and out of the sphere of experience, across all levels of my being, in particular, across the sphere of *visibility* as well as *invisibility*. The *invisible* limit is, eventually, the one which is *present* only along with the cut through all the intermediary levels. The *presence* influenced by the *act* can never be its intentional *object*. To the extent *I* try to make it such, it withdraws and changes its character. In the most trivial cases, if *I* think "I have to learn swimming. I have to learn swimming..." while trying to follow the instructions, *I* will have very hard time. The best *I* can do is to concentrate on following the instructions. If the intention of *my act* is 'to be good', *I* may happen to do a fine thing, but the *invisible aspect* of the act has then withdrawn beyond the horizon of this intention and brought forth *presence* of something more than what *I* intended. (Probably, of what motivated *me* in the first place *to try* to be good.) It is not that *I* am not conscious of what, eventually, hides behind my *acts* – it is that *I* *can not possibly* make it *reflectively actual*, in any case not in the *act itself*. This rest of every act is the witness, on the one hand, of its anchoring in the wider sphere of my being and, on the other, of *act's* possibility to influence it.

208. A trivial example can be formation of more and more advanced concepts. One will usually start with a very rough and simplified understanding of something, but by prolonged study one's *concepts* will be refined. One tends to confirm it only by observing an increased ability to solve *actual* problems, perhaps, to relate various aspects and provide more sophisticated *actual* descriptions. But it is not so that more knowledge gets simply accumulated as separate pieces in a big sack. With the possible exception of photographic memory, a person forced to memorise more will also form more or less explicit structures for arranging the increasing amount of facts. More *or less* explicit! The less explicit ones may not be accessible to observation or introspection but, the claim is, they are formed nevertheless. Arranging mathematical or strictly formalised knowledge in such a way, one will typically identify more central results and theorems which allow one to derive secondary results. But this is only a plain *visible analogy*. Arranging less formalised knowledge and memories, one will also develop structures which researches on memory try to unveil. For our part it is only the most rough and general of such structures which is interesting – the structure of 'compressing' a manifold of *actualities* into a more unified *nexus*, perhaps, gathering them under the unifying *sign of a concept*.

We are not talking here only about memory in the common sense of the word, for the 'compressed' *actualities* can, in fact, slip out of memory. But they have contributed their part to the formation of something which we might identify with a *virtual center*. We have indicated a generic example of such a process when discussing memory and possible transition of *actual events* to *virtuality*, §§153.ff. In the case of *conceptual* constructions, this can manifest itself as the acquired ability to 'intuit' a large number of related problems in one act (called often an "act of intuition", but what matters to us is only that it is *one act*). Prolonged and dedicated study of an area leads to a *development of intuition*, to the state where a person is able to grasp, in one moment, a variety of aspects and to know that and how these aspects are related and might be *actualised*. The same happens when learning some skills, like swimming. At first, every movement has to be consciously attended and actively controlled. It is only through repetition and exercise that *I*, or rather my body, 'gets it', that all the movements, their sequences and mutual relations converge into an intrinsic and organised whole.

209. Now, such processes happen not only when we try to learn something but also when we do not. The level to which the involved *actualities* can be brought may vary, but the idea is the same – they get organised, or disorganised, they get stored for an easy access in long term memory, or they get 'forgotten'. As they 'move upwards', they enter various (and hardly recognisable) complexes

and, eventually, disappear in *virtuality*. The only thing is that, although they may thus disappear in their *actual* form, they are retained in the *invisible* centers to the formation of which they have contributed.

In such a process, *invisible* centers may be formed, from which it may be impossible to extract the ‘original parts’. This may be exemplified, for instance, by the subconscious formation of complexes (in the Jungian sense of the word) or other subconscious processes which analysis may only try to bring forth again. Saying that “time heals all wounds” we refer to quite the same process of ‘covering up’ or, perhaps, ‘suppressing’ some experiences by a long series of *actualities*. The original experience and its memory seldom will disappear, but they can gradually dissolve, lose the possibly violent or damaging potential, in an aura of works and days which force man to focus on other things.

Education and upbringing of children offer innumerable examples. “Sow an action, and you reap a habit; sow a habit, and you reap a character; sow a character, and you reap a destiny.”<sup>332</sup> True, but which action will lead to what habit, which habit to what character, etc., are things which we can only approximate in general terms. “When a man dwells on the pleasures of sense, attraction for them arises in him. From attraction arises desire, the lust of possession, and this leads to passion, to anger. From passion comes confusion of mind, then loss of remembrance, the forgetting of duty...”<sup>333</sup> Plausibility of such observations depends always on more specific and personal aspects and traits which determine *concretely* what is and what is not “dwelling”, “lust”, etc. Apocryphal stories describing childhood of a saint or a hero are exactly reflections of such a rough and general understanding of the ways lower events and actual experiences accumulate into higher traits of character and personality.

Dependency on the *concrete* personal traits is reflected by the fact that each step upwards requires, of course, time. A single event or *act* has seldom deep consequences, and repetition of prescribed *acts* may even have consequences quite opposite to the intended ones. For between any two controlled *acts*, many others happen, and even if the person does not *act*, he still *experiences*. Very few are lucky enough to have a wise tutor who is able to give a constant, personal advice. For the most, we learn and acquire our habits and character through roughly accidental interaction with parents, family and immediate surroundings. Which, for the most, means, we do not acquire much character and even less destiny. Again statistically, the less advice, control and guidance in upbringing, the less strength and character, that is, unity of the personal being. For loose and free confrontation with the indefinite, perhaps only freely chosen, objectives, as many a pedagogue would say nowadays, the “promotion of independence and individual creativity” by avoiding obstacles and high demands, breed perhaps individualism but hardly individuality.

Tedious work, perhaps boring work is, more often than not, a blessing which teaches a young person more than superficial overstimulation. But sure, whatever happens will have an influence on the habits, character, perhaps even destiny. We always get what we sow, but we hardly ever know what we are sowing. “We live forward, but we understand backward” says Kierkegaard and deep wisdom, which is also knowledge of the future, is a rare exception. It requires, above all, the acquaintance not only with the seeds one uses to sow but also the soil into which they are sown. For *acts* and *actual experiences* are always immersed into the *invisible* sphere of *concrete* personality and statistics may be helpful but will never suffice.

Just like a wise teacher knows how to proceed and what to teach, knows it and follows the course even if none of his pupils understands ‘why’ and ‘what for’, so an adult may sometimes be in a need of a good advice. A good advice may be something I just did not realise but recognise once it is given. But more profoundly, a good advice tells me to do something which I do not understand, something I am *not able* to understand. It tells me to act in a way which I do not know whereto leads. Surely, one has to have a lot trust in the person to follow such an advice. But if it was a wise advice, I will learn once I arrive, because acting in the recommended way (and if heavens so wish) will eventually lead to a new *unity*, if not to the place I had imagined and wished, so in any case to a new resting place. Wisdom is the capacity to give a good advice which, like a teacher’s knowledge and instruction, transcends the horizon of the one who is in need of it. Transcending this horizon means here exactly that it knows the effects of accumulated activity over time, that it is not restricted to the mere *actuality*.

---

<sup>332</sup> James, in George Cotkin, p.69

<sup>333</sup> *The Bhagavad-Gita*. II:62-62

Ontological *founding* of lower levels by the higher ones does not concern any specific contents but only the general structure and character of each level. The influence of the lower levels on the higher ones, on the other hand, concerns specific contents, like bringing up a particular (kind of) person, developing particular (kinds of) skills. We will consider such a more specific relation between the contents of various levels in the following Book. But before that, let us venture on a small excursion...

### 3 The origin of mathematics

This section is a digression because we are interested in a unified picture of *existence*, not in philosophy of any particular region of Being, let alone, of (any particular) science. The current Book does not present epistemology as any ‘theory of knowledge’ guaranteeing any certainties and resolving all doubts or – what appearing more modest is even more presumptuous – offering a method for resolving doubts which might possibly arise. Our epistemology (if epistemology it is) addresses only the general ways of meeting *transcendence* and its *actual reflections*. The search for truth and the ineradicable conviction that it not only means something but also is better than falsehood, is only one special form of this fundamental *thirst founded in the awareness of the insufficiency of visibility*; curiosity or fascination, confusion or boredom, bafflement and even despair, are others and all can occur in various combinations with each other. Our epistemology (if epistemology it is) presents only some *reflections* which might help maintaining the continuity between the *actual* contents and their *transcendent* origins, the tension without which *dissociated actuality* turns into dull emptiness devoid of the sense of meaning and reality. Scientific activity can be an expression of such a confusion or curiosity, but questions about the *actual* scientific contents, the *actual* results of *objectivistic* reductions, do not have much to do here.

Yet, this digression has its reason. Mathematics has always held a particular place among the sciences. Indeed, to such an extent that most other sciences try desperately to approach mathematical standards (sometimes for better, usually, for worse). Good reasons for the prominence of mathematics can be discerned at the level of abstraction at which we are moving. One shouldn’t probably go as far as to say that the beauty and purity of mathematics have, in themselves, existential import. But they are reflections of the spiritual dimension of *existence* in the degree unmatched by any other science. The *a priori* character of mathematical objects and constructions makes one suspect, if not *clearly recognise*, the ultimately *transcendent* origin of mathematical truths.

Discussing truth, we related occasionally its levels to various forms of mathematical logic (§192, footnotes 285, 305, 309, 314.) We would have to agree that such a classification is a bit arbitrary. Formality of logical systems allows one to mix various notions, like negation, disjunction, as well as semantical constructions, and apply them across all the levels. And this is so because mathematical systems do not describe things, feelings, actual perceptions, but uniform mathematical objects. They may be motivated by extra-mathematical considerations but once formulated they become part of mathematics. One mathematical theory can postulate complex mathematical objects vastly different from those postulated by another such theory. But to the extent they are both *mathematical* they address, eventually, basic mathematical objects and therefore, can be related to each other.

The question concerns not the detailed choices but the fundamental issue: what is the relation (if any) between a logical, or generally, mathematical system and extra-mathematical reality? What are the ultimate objects of mathematics, and what, if any, is their relation to experience?

210. In every science one finds the hard seed of pre-scientific reality and beautiful flowers of scientific imagination. The former, the origin, is rooted in our intuition and experience. As the virtual origin it neither contains all possible details of future results nor determines the ways in which science can develop. It only precedes any such development, lies beyond and before it, and lends its basic notions some intuitive content which may be appealing even to the uninitiated laymen.

Origin is not a foundation. In fact, laying down a foundation marks already a definitive break with the origin. It amounts to internalising the original intuitions in terms of a language which from now on will develop according to its own standards. We do not want to review the arguments between formalists, Platonists, intuitionists, etc. We do not even want to see the differences between classical and non-classical mathematics, between geometry, arithmetics,

algebra, topology, etc. Such distinctions involve one into mathematical arguments. The question about origin is, on the contrary, the question about what makes all these branches into branches of one and the same mathematics, what makes the results of Pythagoras, Fibonacci, Viete, Riemann, Cantor equally mathematical.

Quine's statement that a (mathematical) theory commits one to the ontology determined by the range of bound variables, is certainly very clear and convincing. Indeed, the entities a theory describes are those which can witness to the truth of the existential statements – “there exists an  $x$  such that...”. Any particular, not only mathematical theory has to specify such entities. But our point is very different. As we will argue, any mathematical theory addresses, eventually, only one kind of entities. As remarked in connection with various logics – differences of modeled phenomena and motivations notwithstanding, they are all *mathematical* logics. Quine's ontology – the range of bound variables – is still entirely *objectivistic*. The theory represents epistemological apparatus which deals with particular entities, that is, a particular ontology. One is concerned exclusively with the objects explicitly treated by the theory, and these are objects defined already *within* a mathematical world. As such, one does not at all address the issue of origin but at most of foundation and, in fact, a much more specific issue of differences between the local ontologies of various theories or formalisms. Asking about the origin of mathematics we will not be concerned with such issues at all; we are not asking what objects can possibly be constructed mathematically but, on the contrary, what primary objects give rise to the mathematical constructions as such. The origin of such objects will be found at the very first stages of differentiation, in the sphere where ontology has not as yet got dissociated from epistemology.

### 3.1 What is a point?

“A point is that which has no part.”<sup>334</sup> It is the residual unity “beyond which there cannot be anything less.”<sup>335</sup> Intuition of a point is the same as the intuition of a ‘substance’, of a purely *actual object*, which is the mere site of its self-identity, that is, a point. It is like the least something which still is, the least something from which nothing can be removed without removing the thing (that is, the point) itself. Evanescence site of pure *immediacy*...

Now, it might seem that to come from *actually given objects* to mathematical points there is a need for abstraction, since an *actual object* is always a particular thing with all its properties, while point is only the residual site with no properties whatsoever. It might seem that a point results from a process of abstraction in which “we obtain from each object a more and more bloodless phantom. Finally we thus obtain from each object a something wholly deprived of content; But the something obtained from one object is different from the something obtained from another object – though it is not easy to say how...”<sup>336</sup> It might indeed seem so, but only when we assume that *objects* are the only original givens and that their givenness is a primitive, simple *immediacy*. Then, indeed, anything lacking in some *actual* content seems to arise from the *actual* givens only by abstraction.

But *objects* are not the original givens. On the contrary, *objects* are abstractions from the concreteness of experience, results of an interplay of *distinctions* within the *horizon of actuality*. Consequently, the process of *founding* does not proceed from *objects* towards their “bloodless phantoms”, for these phantoms are there, are given along with the *objects* themselves. An appearance of an *object* is equivalent with the narrowing of the *horizon of actuality* to *immediacy* which dissociates the original *distinctions* from their background. The apparent independence of *objects*, not only from the *subject* but also from each other, the fact that “something obtained from one object is different from the something obtained from another object”, is the result of this isolation.

What precedes, in the order of *founding*, appearance not only of *objects* but of anything whatsoever is *distinction*. And as in *any* experience, its whole structure, that is, its whole *foundation* is also experienced in the *immediate self-consciousness*: *distinguishing* particular contents we also experience (even though not thematically) the very fact of *distinguishing*.

---

<sup>334</sup> Euclid, *The Elements*. I, Def.1

<sup>335</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I:5/13

<sup>336</sup> G. Frege, *Review of Husserl's Philosophie der Arithmetik*.

Furthermore, even if there are no rigid *distinctions*, that is, no sharp boundaries *distinguishing* precisely and univocally one content from another, the fact of their *distinctness* is given sharply and precisely. Just as one can be uncertain where one stripe of a rainbow ends and another begins, so one is certain that they are different stripes, that each has, if not a sharp boundary, then in any case some kernel which is distinct from the kernel of another stripe. The mere, yet quite fundamental, fact of *distinguishing*, with the immediate awareness of definite distinctness, is a *pure distinction*. It has the same character as the pure precision of givenness of an *object*, its mere ‘being there’, in the *immediacy of reflection that it is*.

*Intuition of a point is the same as the intuition of pure distinction.* <sup>337</sup>

Consequently, no abstraction is needed to arrive at a point, “we have a direct awareness of mathematical form as an archetypal structure.”<sup>338</sup> It is a structure present in any apprehension of an *object*, an aspect of any actual experience and as such is itself experienced.

213. True, abstraction may be needed to posit a point as an *actual object*, to reflectively isolate this aspect of an experience. But this does not change the fact that it is an aspect of every experience and emerges from there only as a result of reflective isolation – it is not a mere construction, an empty, or conceptual abstraction. Taking a point in this way, as an *object* of reflection, we can specialise the above thesis:

*A point is a representation of the fact of distinguishing, of pure distinction.*

Pure distinctness can be characterised as the fact that points are mutually indistinguishable yet distinct, they are distinctions without content, differences without reasons: like the posited ultimate ‘substances’ or, more concretely, as the absolute beginnings, identical in so far as the mere fact of beginning is concerned, yet distinct by virtue of the absoluteness of true beginning. Pure distinctions are the fundamental objects of mathematics, the objects which are not results of any mathematical foundation but which mathematics inherits from experience –

214. *Mathematics is the science of pure distinctions.*

### 3.2 Numbers – multiplicity of distinctions

215. Introducing us to the notions of number and counting the teacher started to put apples – one after another – on the table. “We have one apple. What happens if I put another apple? Well, now we have two apples. And if I put yet another one? Well,...” Did not your teacher do a similar thing?

What should happen if he run out of apples? What should happen if he suddenly pulled out a pear and put it on the table after a series of apples? Can you imagine the confusion? An apple, yet another apple, more apples, a vague patter begins to emerge and, suddenly, a pear!! Not that the kids would for ever lose the chance of acquiring the concept of number but how much extra work for the teacher! How would he proceed to explain now that the fact that a pear is not an apple does not matter at all? How to explain that a pear is simply yet another object – a fruit,

---

<sup>337</sup>‘Intuition’ here should not be taken in a thetic sense, as an ‘intuition of ...’, positing some *object* ‘...’. It is an aspect of an *immediate experience*, a *non-reflective*, non-positional *self-consciousness* of the structure of the *actual experience*. Such an intuition, a ‘point-awareness’ is the same as the ‘*pure distinction-awareness*’.

This identification may seem to go counter our quite different images of the two: point is imagined as a mere dot ‘, while distinction as a line | splitting the space in two. But these are only pictures. We could bring them closer, for instance, if we imagined distinction as a circle o (still splitting the space in two). Since no distinction is rigid, the exact circumference of the circle is blurred. But this does not make the fact of it being made less clear – the fact which we could imagine as the point at the center of the circle. So understood, *pure distinction* corresponds to the neo-Platonic monad responsible (albeit always in a very unclear way) for the generation of actual numbers. “The cause is in it [monad], and they [numbers] are causally in it because it subsists as the beginning of all numbers. [...] intelligible numbers are so poured out from the monad that in some way they become clear in the mind; next flowing out from mind to reason [...]” [J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. III;p.172] “In the case of numbers, the unit remains intact while something else produces, and thus number arises in dependence on the unit: [...] there is, primarily or secondarily, some form or idea from the monad in each of the successive numbers – the latter still participating, though unequally, in the unit [...]” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:5.5] Distinction between monad generating the numbers and The One is maintained but never entirely clear. (Eriugena calls even Creator a Monad: “Monad which is sole Cause and Creator of all things visible and invisible [vs.] created monad in which all numbers always subsist causally, uniformly, and according to their reasons, and from which they emerge in many forms.” [Ibid. III;p.172-3]) Very close conceptual associations between the two are handled by more or less intricate hierarchies of (degrees of) units, like The One, monad, henad, henads, etc., into which we will not inquire.

<sup>338</sup>G. Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*. Introduction; p.xxiv

perhaps – distinct from all previous ones? An apple is so much an apple that the sixth apple put on the table is the same as the fifth one – except that it is the sixth. A pear after the fifth apple would not be the sixth – it is too different from the apples. It would be the first pear rather than the sixth fruit. The difference of content would come into the way of explaining the *pure distinction* of number.

We do usually count apples separately from pears. And if we count both we say we are counting fruits. Thus Frege says that “number is the extension of a concept”<sup>339</sup> because as soon as we count quite different objects together we seem to subsume them under some common, more general concept. ‘In fact, we do not ask ‘How many are Caesar and Pompey and London and Edinburgh?’’<sup>340</sup> In fact, we do not – but we could! And counting cities is no different from counting cities and persons, counting fruits is no different from counting fruits and houses and the nasty persons one met last week. Do we then subsume them under a more general concept? What concept? Insisting on the positive answer, we would eventually have to say: the concept of a ‘mere something’, a point, a *pure distinction*.

Number does not express a ‘property’ of any concept, but rather the unlimited ability to ignore any properties, any conceptual differences of content. It precedes all concepts.<sup>341</sup> Eventually, we count somethings, indeed, points or, to use a synonym, *objects*. The word “object” expresses exactly this pure self-identity, empty identity of a noumenal  $x$  which is itself merely because it is not something else. Frege’s “bloodless phantom” is an *object* – a hardly imaginable site of the ultimate identity of the thing he started with.<sup>342</sup>

If one wanted to object that apples on the table are not meant as an analogy of *pure distinction* because they have different positions, appear on the table at different times, and so on, that is, because they fall within the extension of a concept where other differences are needed to distinguish between the objects, then we would only repeat the question: why do the teachers not count fruits but only apples? The objection does not change their procedure which is: make the difference as small as physically possible, make the objects so similar that removing this last amount of difference would erase the distinction itself. If one feels a need for it, one might define the empirical analogue of a *pure distinction* as such a smallest possible difference (whatever that might mean). ‘Numerical difference’ is the notion corresponding exactly to *pure distinction* as distinct from ‘difference of content’.

But we still have some road to travel before we arrive at numbers. For the present, we only have the ‘numerical difference’. Now, no *distinction* occurs alone, there is nothing like ‘the first distinction’, only a transition from the undifferentiated *one* to the gradually increasing manifold of *distinctions*. The *horizon of actuality*, which is like a ‘snapshot’ of experience, contains always a multiplicity of *distinctions*. Viewing these as *pure distinctions*, that is, focusing only on this aspect of *an actual experience* which determines the mere distinctness of *actual contents*, yields the intuition of proper multiplicity, that is multiplicity of *pure distinctions*. Each *actual experience* is also an *experience* of such a multiplicity. This is well reflected in the most primitive, unary notation for numbers, which merely marks the *distinctions*: I, II, III,... or even better •, ••, •••,...

Multiplicity as mere distinctness of the *actual contents*, as the *immediate self-consciousness* of

<sup>339</sup>G. Frege, *The concept of number*. §68. Literally: “the number which applies to the concept  $F$  is the extension of the concept «equinumerous with the concept  $F$ ».”

<sup>340</sup>The idea is, of course, old and renowned. “For reason counts different things together with things of the same kind, so that clearly persons are counted with persons, qualities with qualities, and so forth with other things.” [Clarembald of Arras, *The Gloss on Boethius’ De Trinitate*. I:§46] Ockham refers to those who similarly, though with a much stronger empirical bias, “[c]oncerning discrete quantity [...] maintain that number is nothing but the actual numbered things themselves.” [W. Ockham, *Summa totius logicae*. I:c.xliv]

<sup>341</sup>We could hardly disagree more with any empirical reductions of mathematics as suggested in the previous footnote. On the contrary, “[w]ise men, indeed, do not say that the numbers of animals, shrubs, grasses and other bodies or things are related to the knowledge of the arithmetical art; but they assign to arithmetic only the intellectual, invisible, incorporeal numbers established in knowledge alone and not placed substantially in any other subject.” [J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. III:p.163] One of those wise men (probably unknown to Eriugena) says: “Where lies the need of [say] decad to a thing which, by totaling to that power, is decad already? / If the Beings preceded the numbers and this were discerned upon them at the stirring, to such and such a total, of the numbering principle, then the actual number of the Beings would be a chance.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:6.5/10]

<sup>342</sup>This fundamental importance of distinction is well illustrated in the logicist’s attempts to define numbers. E.g., R. Carnap, *The logicist foundation of mathematics*, follows the procedure suggested by Frege: for number 2, one begins by stating that at least two objects fall under a concept  $f$ :  $2_m(f) \Leftrightarrow \exists x \exists y : x \neq y \wedge f(x) \wedge f(y)$ . Then, number 2 is said to apply to a concept  $f$  iff:  $2_m(f) \wedge \neg 3_m(f)$ . Identity (or dually, its negation) needed in the first part is the undefinable primitive relation of the logical language.

*pure distinctions*, is the experiential origin of a set. It is not yet a number which brings us already closer to a possible foundation. What makes a number into a number is not any mystical quality but its relation to other numbers<sup>343</sup> and an elaboration of such relations is already a matter of mathematical reflection. Let us only sketch the most elementary beginning which follows from the origin, from the experience of *pure distinctions* and their multiplicities.

A primitive shepherd, who not only cannot count, but does not even have a slightest idea of a number, had probably proceeded something like that. To check if all his many sheep return in the evening from the pasture, he let them out in the morning one by one, marking each leaving sheep as a cut on a stick. In the evening, he let them in one by one, marking each entering sheep on the same stick, with another mark next to, or across, one of the marks made in the morning. If every morning mark is matched by one evening mark, everything is OK. If, however, some morning marks remain unmatched by any evening mark, some sheep are missing.

The shepherd performs the most natural, in fact, the only possible operation one can perform on two *actual* multiplicities – he relates them by associating points in one with those in the other. He does it in a particular way serving his particular purpose: he matches each evening mark with only one, but always distinct, morning mark – he establishes an injective relation (indeed, a function) from evening marks to morning marks. If this happens to be also surjective (every morning mark gets matched by one evening mark), then the conclusion is that the multiplicities of sheep in the morning and in the evening are equal – there is the same number of sheep. If the function is not surjective (some morning marks remain unmatched), the number of returning sheep is less than the number of sheep which left in the morning. This is the well-known set-theoretical definition of ordering of cardinal numbers.<sup>344</sup>

Such an operation is performed not so much on the actual objects (sheep, marks), as on their collections viewed as mere multiplicities of *pure distinctions*. Indeed, to pose the problem in the first place, to have the possibility of even asking the question about *all* sheep returning, the shepherd had to recognise that the relevant aspect is *multiplicity* of *distinct* sheep. But any multiplicity is proper – even if one uses some particular, *objective* tokens, it is always multiplicity of *pure distinctions*.

The set-theoretical construction of cardinal numbers (as representatives of classes of equinumerous sets) is already more than their *reflective* experience. The number 2 does not emerge exclusively as an abstraction from different collections containing exactly 2 elements. What would be the basis for such a generalisation? It would have to be the notion of ‘the same number of elements’ in different collections, as set-theory says, of a bijective correspondence. But such a correspondence presupposes that one has already abstracted away all differences of content, that all such differences *already are ignored*. The shepherd could not form the idea of representing the sheep by the marks on his stick, if he did not already have the notion of the proper multiplicity of sheep. The marks on the stick *represent* something – this something is not sheep but their multiplicity.<sup>345</sup>

---

<sup>343</sup>P. Benacerraf, *What numbers could not be*

<sup>344</sup>A set *A* has cardinality less than or equal to the cardinality of a set *B*, if and only if there exists an injective function from *A* to *B*. They have the same cardinality if there exists a function which is not only injective but also surjective (bijective). G. Frege, *The concept of number*, §63, quotes Hume: “If two numbers are so combined that the one always has a unit which corresponds to each unit of the other, then we claim they are equal.”

<sup>345</sup>This should suggest our attitude towards accounts like *The origin of geometry* in E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology* [Appendix 1; also II:9], which is not phenomenology of mathematics but of socio-historical emergence of geometry. One could be tempted to apply a kind of ontological argument (as those quoted in footnote 341) against such and similar approaches which all repeat, in one form or another, the idea from Herodotus, *The Histories*, II:109, that the art of geometry had its origin in the challenge presented by the Nile to the Egyptians, and only later became an abstract science. But although *origin*, and the *original foundation* of mathematics in particular, exists only through the *actual* manifestations (and, one might want to add, its empirical history), it is in no way dependent on, let alone reducible to, such manifestations. If *pure distinctions* were not given originally (and originally) in intuition, if relations of *pure distinctions* were not available to us *a priori*, we would never be able to form an idea, to encounter a phenomenon of, say, a circle. A circle, an ideal circle is determined and given *only* by a center, a point, and a radius, that is, *equinumerous multiplicities* separating each point of the circumference from the center. It could never arise as an abstraction from experiences, or as a repeatable correlate of acts, in short, as a perfected *Limesgestalt* of imperfect circles, no matter how often encountered in nature. (What would determine the direction of such a generalisation, of such a “conceivable perfecting ‘again and again’...”? Husserlian ‘repeatability’ may be, perhaps, taken as a characterisation of ideality, but it is only a characterisation founded upon this ideality and not other way around.) We could, perhaps, by accident come across and use flat objects which rotate and roll, but we would never invent a wheel. Because wheel is not a generalisation of round objects. It is a circle, an ideal circle (even if in practice it is not) which could not

It shouldn't be necessary to go any further, since we already have the basis for a number system: 217. multiplicites of *pure distinctions* (various 'numbers') and the basics of an ordering relation between them. The rest is left for the creative imagination of mathematicians. A number system consisting of two numbers only: 1, 'many', contains already all essential features. "The Tououpinambos [native Americans I have spoken with] had no names for numbers above 5; any number beyond that they made out by showing their fingers, and the fingers of others who were present."<sup>346</sup> Anthropologists report the existence of tribes whose whole number system contains only four numbers: 1, 2, 3, 'many'. The mathematics one can do with such a system is rather poor but it is *mathematics*, it is a number system. Although it remains still in a virtual form close to the experiential origin, it involves already the essential intuitions on which also more advanced number systems are based.

### 3.3 Infinity

Thus point is a *reflection of pure distinction*, the *pure immediacy*, while number, initially as 218. mere multiplicity, is the corresponding *representation of simultaneity* in terms of *pure distinctions*. Comparison of multiplicites, not to mention the total ordering relation, are more advanced constructions which bring us already close to a possible foundation. Just like a point is a purely *actual, immediate experience*, this intuition of a number, of multiplicity, is consummated fully within the *horizon of actuality*. Even if sheep enter the farm over some period of time, no time is involved in the fact of having a given multiplicity of them.

Now, just like *distinctions* do not come alone, so the numbers do not appear separately. There is no *recognition* of a number, say 5, without *all* other numbers being given around it. Just like *distinctions* emerge in the midst of *chaos*, so numbers emerge in the midst of infinity.

Just like *transcendence* is an aspect accompanying every *actuality*, so infinity is an *equipollent aspect* of multiplicity itself. It is not some late and advanced addition to the simple intuition of finite number. For instance, it is not only a consequence of, say, positional number notation, where generation of ever greater numbers is a matter of a mechanical principle. In the system with four numbers: 1, 2, 3, 'many', the last one does play the role of infinitely large number, it comprises everything which is 'more than 3'. In the Roman number system, instead of "three" one had "thousand"; names for numbers greater than thousand were compound expressions of which the highest component was "thousand". Roman notation for numbers made it hard, or rather simply impossible, to write arbitrarily large numbers. But it would not be plausible to conclude from this that Romans did not have the idea of an infinity of numbers, although the *precision* of this idea might leave much to be desired. The problem was observed already by some Romans, as exemplified in M. Capella, *Arithmetica*, where the ambitions of arithmetic are expressly limited to low numbers, preferably below 9000. But even such a limitation concerned only the correctness of calculation and not the universe of numbers. The question "Is there the biggest number?" is almost as natural as "Is there any limit to the distinctions we make?" or, perhaps, "Is the world infinite?".

It may seem that the basic intuition of infinity comes in the form of potentiality, with perhaps the 219. most obvious experiential counterpart being *more of complexes*. It is easy to imagine that there is *more* than what one, at any time, can see here and now. "[Y]et there be those who imagine they have positive ideas of infinite duration and space. It would, I think, be enough to destroy any such positive idea of infinite, to ask him that has it,— whether he could add to it or no; which would easily show the mistake of such a positive idea."<sup>347</sup> Although there is no limit, yet one *actuality* can always become next one; one can always add 1 to whatever is there already. We never arrive at anything, but as usual in such cases, we obtain (or rather *posit*) a shadowy regulative idea, the possibility of indefinite progression, which in this case amounts to unboundedness, i.e., potential infinity.

---

be even thought without the relations of number and equality of multiplicites.

<sup>346</sup>J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. II:16.6. It is interesting to observe that Locke speaks about 'names' of numbers. The Indians obviously had understanding of numbers larger than 5 for which they only did not have names. Cf. also C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, W. Hartner, *Zahlen und Zahlensysteme*....

<sup>347</sup>J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. II/17:13 [We have to ignore here that Locke is speaking about infinity of time and space – the same argument was used against any idea of actual infinity.]

Various forms of rationalism used to be less reductionistic than empiricism and showed in general more liking for actual infinity. The following might be almost a direct answer to Locke: “if an infinite line be measured out in foot lengths, it will consist of an infinite number of such parts; it would equally consist of an infinite number of parts, if each part measured only an inch: therefore, one infinity would be twelve times as great as the other. – [...] all these absurdities (if absurdities they be, which I am not now discussing), from which it is sought to extract the conclusion that extended substance is finite, do not at all follow from the notion of an infinite quantity, but merely from the notion that an infinite quantity is measurable, and composed of finite parts; therefore, the only fair conclusion to be drawn is that infinite quantity is not measurable, and cannot be composed of finite parts. [...]”<sup>348</sup> ‘Measurement’ seems to have to do with composition of finite (and discrete) parts, in fact with successive progression. The conclusion is then that such a progression does not lead to any infinity for infinity turns out to be incompatible with ‘measure’. It is present *a priori* or it is never reached in any way.

220. Now, we do not intend to review the history of the conflict of actual vs. potential infinity, because most of the involved arguments can be easily dismissed once we have the precise concepts of infinity and cardinality.<sup>349</sup> Indeed, philosophers seem to be less occupied with infinity since mathematicians got the control over the concept. We know that infinity is irreducible to progress (actual infinity irreducible to potential one), and those who do not like it may simply refuse to deal with infinity at all but not claim any reduction.<sup>350</sup> Technically, this irreducibility is reflected by the need for axioms of infinity – in set theory, the axiom “There exists an infinite set”, but also in Euclid, the axiom “Any line can be prolonged indefinitely.” In the case of continuum, any use of progression is known as, at best, a way of approximating the actual results.

But we do not intend any review. The crucial point is that although the concepts and understanding of infinity have reached a very sophisticated stage, they have been discussed for millennia – perhaps, in a confused manner, but on the purely intuitive basis. No matter the concepts, one has always taken recourse to something like infinity – perhaps only an idea, perhaps not, but something... Even the mere unboundedness of indefinite progression is already an idea of actual infinity in disguise – it is infinity reduced by the epistemological scepticism to *actuality*. The fact that from a finite set of observations we nevertheless make the spring to the potentially infinite indicates, in a manner of the ontological proof, that the infinite is there already. All the emphasis one has to put on “potentially” (while, so to speak, the unfortunate word “infinite” sneaks in through the back-door), like all too insistent a need to deny something, suggests presence which one will only in extreme be willing to label “unreal”.

Potential infinity is only a conceptual reduction of actual infinity to the epistemic *horizon of actuality*. But infinity, the actual infinity itself, is founded in the *chaos above experience* and in the eventual *transcendence of nothingness*. This experience, or rather, this aspect of any experience, the *chaos viewed as chaos of pure distinctions*, is what *founds* the immediate intuition of the ‘largest possible’ multiplicity, of the ‘totality of everything’, ‘maximum beyond which there can be nothing greater.’<sup>351</sup>

221. The experiential *foundation* knows *nexus* but not necessarily all the distinctions which are so dear to later *reflection*. The Greek *apeiron* can be and is translated *either* as ‘infinite’ *or* as ‘indefinite’ *or* as ‘unlimited’, and we mean *all* these when speaking about *foundation* of the idea of infinity.<sup>352</sup> And, of course, meaning *all*, we must mean *none*, for all these distinctions are later than

<sup>348</sup>B. Spinoza, *Ethics*. Note to Prop.XV

<sup>349</sup>Dedekind’s definition (a set is infinite iff it is equinumerous with its proper subset) makes Locke’s argument above obsolete, or rather simply wrong; while Cantor’s calculus of cardinalities shows that the intuitions about number of elements in finite collections often do not generalise to infinite sets (already for the least infinite cardinal  $\aleph_0$ , we have  $\aleph_0 + \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$ ; so, for instance,  $12 \cdot \aleph_0 = \aleph_0$ ). One can admire Spinoza’s foresight that such apparent absurdities, perhaps, are not absurdities. He nevertheless uses them as such to dismiss the idea of measuring the infinite. As often happens, a wrong argument may serve a perfectly acceptable conclusion.

<sup>350</sup>One can obtain some sub-branches of mathematics, but these are only sub-branches. Intuitionism is a strong example, but likewise Hilbert’s program of finitariness, and then also the theory of computability are expressions of this potent idea of the early XX-th century’s *Zeitgeist* of finitude and discretisation.

<sup>351</sup>Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I:2.5

<sup>352</sup>“[Earth’s] part beneath goes down to infinity.” [Xenophanes DK 21B28] “The unlimited is the original material of existing things [...]. It] is immortal and indestructible.” [Anaximander DK 12B1/3] Etc., etc. One might be tempted to admit also the translation as ‘unfinished’ suggesting, as Greeks would certainly like, incompleteness and some unreadiness of the infinite.

their common origin. Infinity, in particular discrete, countable infinity is the final *actualisation*, an *actual* expression of the *transcendence* which has become a mere totality of *actualities*. It is the horizontal projection of the unlimited/ubounded/infinite which are so many ways of representing the *indistinct*, ‘everything’. Potential infinity arises as a still further *reflection* which insists on the primacy, perhaps even the only ‘reality’, of the *actually* given contents.

A *reflection* of the original *apeiron*, as the *chaos* which underlies every experience, will be present in one way or another in every original mathematical intuition. Its mathematical counterpart will vary depending on the level of sophistication of the mathematical apparatus. It may be ‘3’, or ‘more than 3’, ‘many’ or ‘infinity’. The most recent version seems to be the ‘totality of all mathematical objects’. Having tamed infinities, Cantor retained the intuition that the universe of *all* such objects can not possibly be a mathematical object, which was a premonition of future problems. The paradoxes of the ‘set of all sets’ can now be rendered mathematically manageable (e.g., by restricting the axiom of comprehension, or as in various axiomatisations of classes, or by whatever other means), but the trick is always to exclude the ‘totality of everything’ from the consideration – whatever we cannot speak about, does not cause trouble. But whether represented within or expelled from the formal system, the totality keeps always pointing to the same intuition of the eventual *transcendence*, of the *indistinct* limit of *distinctions*, and reminding, along the lines of the first antinomy, that the limit of the world does not belong to the world.

The fundamental presence of infinity can be better seen on the example of geometry. We started 222. with the intuition of a point which was equated with the (intuition, respectively representation of) *pure distinction*. But points do not appear alone. Even if point’s counterpart is residual *objectivity*, the ‘mere being’ in the *immediacy* of the *reflection that it is*, such a *reflection* is also immediately aware of the *transcendent* horizon surrounding its *actuality* – positing a point, it posits an *actual* multiplicity of points. Sure, we can *reflectively dissociate* an act of imagining a point, from an act imagining a multiplicity of points. But this is only *reflective dissociation*. A point appears always ‘surrounded’ by a background, even if this be only a black, undifferentiated something – shall we say, space? – against which the point is imagined.<sup>353</sup> They emerge only against this undifferentiated background, and here “undifferentiated” means continuous. Points represent thus a discretisation of continuity, of a continuity which transcends the points of *distinctions*, that is, of an actually infinite continuity. But while the primordial infinity of this continuous background is actual infinity, so the multiplicity of points gives rise to potential infinity: no matter how many points are (imagined, posited, thought to be) there, there is always a possibility of ‘extracting’ more points from the undifferentiated background. Once we have a point, we have not only a multiplicity, but an infinity of points. For an *actual* point (whether imagined or drawn) is only a sign of a ‘point which already was there’, it merely marks the focus of our attention. Imagining a space, say, a plane, and ‘putting’ a point on (or rather, ‘extracting’ a point from) it, the important thing is not *where* we ‘put’ it but that it can be ‘put’ *anywhere*. This is, in one, actual infinity and continuity (of course, not in the technical sense), the pure heterogeneity of chaos in the immediate neighbourhood of *indistinct one*.

Geometry, which with its points and planes gives the primordial intuition of continuity, is also the first stage where the duality of discrete-continuous arises. The duality forms, as Brouwer put it, ‘two-oneness’. After the *distinctions* have occurred it becomes perplexing to decide whether continuum consists of parts or not, whether things are infinitely divisible or not, whether infinite series can sum up to finite magnitudes and whether Achilles will ever catch up with the tortoise – whether one is a *chaos* of many or else whether *chaotic* many is really one.

The differences between geometry (which starts with infinity of *pure distinctions*, discrete points 223. on a continuous background and, shortly after, with the axiom of actual infinity) and arithmetics (which starts with multiplicities of *pure distinctions*, for which potential infinity is a theorem, and which only after long labour arrives at the continuum of real numbers), interesting as they might be, are not essential for us, because they involve us already into a consideration of foundations, if not of mathematics itself. Like the distinctions of actual vs. potential infinity, infinity vs. unboundedness, infinite time vs. infinite space, etc., it only witnesses to the multiplicity of possible ways of reflecting the origin, possible ways of *actually* relating *pure distinctions* to each other and

<sup>353</sup>Here, space may be understood not only as *spatiality* – simultaneity of *distinctions* (I:2.1), but rather as the background from which the *distinctions* emerge. It does remind about Kantian space as the *a priori* form of intuition.

to the *indistinct* background from which they emerge.

### 3.4 A note on foundations

What makes mathematics is not its mere origin and the mere *pure distinctions*, but a structure and relations built on the top of these basic intuitions. The ordering or, at first, only the two-term relations ‘less than’, ‘equal to’, ‘more than’, arise from a particular way of relating the multiplicites of various *actualities*. Structures proper to mathematics are founded on *actual reflections* of such relations. These *representations* can proceed in different directions and lead to different foundations, not to mention different branches of mathematics. It is not our objective to review the historical schools of foundations but we will give a few short examples and remarks illustrating how the origin from *pure distinctions* can be and, in fact, is reflected when forming various foundations.

224. “[A] universe comes into being when a space is severed or taken apart. The skin of a living organism cuts off an outside from an inside. So does the circumference of a circle in a plane. [...] The act [of original severance] is itself already remembered, even if unconsciously, as our first attempt to distinguish different things in a world where, in the first place, the boundaries can be drawn anywhere we please.” This quotation from the introductory Note on The Mathematical Approach in G. Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*, should be self-explanatory at the present point. Starting with the space,  $\square$ , in which a distinction is (to be) made,  $\overline{\square}$ , and postulating two laws, that i) drawing the same distinction twice makes no more distinction than drawing it only once,  $\overline{\square}\ \overline{\square} = \overline{\square}$ , and that ii) crossing a boundary of a distinction and then crossing it back amounts to no distinction,  $\overline{\square} = \square$ , and applying these equations as rewrite rules to various combinations of distinctions, the basic laws of arithmetics, algebra and propositional logic are derived which, although do not develop the full mathematics, make the possibility of such a development at least plausible. The texts on foundation of mathematics and, of course, “mathematical texts generally begin the story somewhere in the middle, leaving the reader to pick up the thread as best he can. Here the story is traced from the beginning.”<sup>354</sup> One can, of course, discuss the laws and the details of the development, but the presentation is the most accurate expression of the idea of actually founding mathematics on *pure distinction* alone. The reader is referred to this book which, if it can appear a bit esoteric and idiosyncratic, so only because it has been undeservedly and unjustly ignored.
225. A much more successful story, at least from the point of view of scientific development and fashion, can be told about category theory.<sup>355</sup> Its initial motivations, as well as the subsequent focus and power lie in the ability to capture structural aspects at a high level of abstraction (often referred to, by other mathematicians, as “general abstract nonsense”). Category theory assumes, as it were, given multiplicities and studies their relations. In fact, it does not even assume multiplicites but just arbitrary objects whose properties are determined exclusively by their mutual relations (morphisms between the objects or, abstractly, just ‘arrows’). It is morphisms, and not any internal structure, which make all the differences to the possible properties of objects. In this way, if we allow the interpretation of morphisms as ‘observations’ (or just ‘source of distinctions’), category theory exemplifies the observational approach (which, as discussed in §§167 ff., p. 195 in connection with identity of indiscernibles, is a variant of distinguishability). Indeed, objects obtained by all categorical constructions are determined only up to ‘indistinguishability’, that is, up to isomorphism.<sup>356</sup> The theory by far exceeds in mathematical generality and sophistication intuitionism which degenerated the notion of ‘observability’, or intuition, to finite constructiblity. (Incidentally, the ghost of ‘category of all categories’ haunts the theory just as the ‘set of all sets’ haunts early set theory. As the definition of a category starts with two *collections* – of objects and morphisms – the foundational problems seem to lead back to those familiar from the set theory.)
226. The best known and most thoroughly studied foundation of mathematics is set theory. Its fundamental primitive concept of a set connects it to the origin. For Frege a set seemed to be

<sup>354</sup> G. Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*. p.xxix

<sup>355</sup> A very simple introduction, accessible even to a person with only basic knowledge of set-theory, is W. F. Lawvere, S. H. Schanuel, *Conceptual Mathematics*. The origins go back to 1940-ties, and S. MacLane, *Category Theory for the Working Mathematician* is the standard reference.

<sup>356</sup> Various strict versions are studied but they represent only special cases. Identity still plays the important role but only when applied to morphisms, that is, ‘observations’.

an extension of a concept, but this is a heavily logicist position influenced, as it seems, by the search for empirical foundations. To begin with, it was much simpler: “a set is a many which can be thought as a one”<sup>357</sup> or, as we would say, a simultaneity of *distinctions*, a proper multiplicity. Cantor attempted alternative formulations – “by a set we are to understand any collection into a whole of definite and separate objects of our intuition or of our thought”<sup>358</sup> – and one can certainly recognise here the importance of having ‘sharp and separate’ objects as members. But the basic intuition remains unchanged, namely, the intuition of a multiplicity, of a collection of *precisely* distinguished somethings, in general *objects* or mathematical objects but, eventually, only of *pure distinctions* which are posited simultaneously as an *actual unity*.<sup>359</sup>

Unlike category theory which studies properties of objects only to the extent they are reflected in the *relations between* the objects, much of the foundational effort in set theory went on actually constructing the universe of sets. Even in such a construction, which does not presuppose any given multiplicities, we can find *pure distinction* as the fundamental building block. The construction starts with nothing, emptiness, that is, with the empty set. But is not there a difference between nothingness and a set which contains nothing? The former is, perhaps: , while the latter: { } (written usually  $\emptyset$ ). This, one could say, is only the matter of notation, of the need to indicate emptiness. But it is much more. There is a difference between nothingness and nothingness captured, between emptiness and emptiness confined, emptiness of a particular container, between nothingness and a set containing nothing. The pair of parentheses { } applied at this very beginning reflects the *pure distinction*, the fact of difference which has been extracted from the nothingness; we could almost say, an act of *actually* addressing the nothingness as distinct from the unaddressed nothingness itself. This *actuality* brings at once also the intuition of multiplicity, of a simultaneous givenness of mutually distinct *pure distinctions*. For once the pair { } is there, it can be applied to everything (even to nothing) and thus the rest follows. The only set we can obtain at the next stage from  $\emptyset$  is  $\{\emptyset\}$  – the set containing one element, the empty set  $\emptyset$ . Of course,  $\emptyset \neq \{\emptyset\}$  – the set  $\emptyset$  has no elements, while  $\{\emptyset\}$  has one. We can then continue adding the parentheses, obtaining new, mutually distinct sets  $\emptyset \neq \{\emptyset\} \neq \{\{\emptyset\}\} \neq \{\{\{\emptyset\}\}\} \dots$  This looks boringly similar to unary numbers and, moreover, produces different sets only in so far that they all contain different elements – but they all (except  $\emptyset$ ) contain exactly one element. This does not open up for internalising mathematics, in particular arithmetics, *within* the set theory, so one has to show more ingenuity (as is done in von Neumann’s construction of ordinals). But the main point has already been made – enough *distinctions* are available and they are obtained from the original { } which is used to represent both *pure distinctions* and their simultaneity. The rest – possible axiomatisations, postulated constructions, resolution of appearing paradoxes – is a matter of more detailed foundation.

One final remark before leaving the subject of foundation. Sameness is complement of distinctness 227. so, instead of saying that mathematics is the science of *pure distinctions* we might, perhaps, say that it is the science of equality (or even identity). It might be an exaggeration to claim that identity is the only form of mathematical theorems, but it is certainly the basic form of mathematical statements.

Equality arises as a special case of relation between multiplicities, namely, when we find a function which is bijective. Equipotence of *A* and *B* is the first moment when equality enters the stage of explicit representation. But implicitly it has been there earlier. The very fact of relating some point *a* of *A* with a point *b* of *B* means, in a sense, identification. If *r* relates *a* with *b*, especially, if the relation *r* is functional, it amounts to saying that the image of *a* under *r* is, i.e., is equal to *b*,  $r(a) = b$ . It depends, of course, on what *r* is. Our shepherd did not identify sheep

<sup>357</sup> G. Cantor, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*. p.204. Or in an earlier formulation: “In refusing to allow the manifold to remain manifold, the mind makes the truth clearer; it draws a separate many into one, either supplying unity not present or keen to perceive the unity brought about by the ordering of the parts.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:6.13] Introducing, as Cantor did, actually infinite sets amounts to following this intuition of the possibility of ‘being thought as one’ all the way through, and has the obvious relation to the (neo-)platonic creed of unity preceding multiplicity invoked in G. Cantor, *Foundations of a General Theory of Aggregates*, e.g., Plotinus, *Enneads* V:6.3; VI:6.11, Proclus, *Elements of Theology* §69 (cf. I:6.2).

<sup>358</sup> G. Cantor, *Contributions....* [also in G. Cantor, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, p.282]

<sup>359</sup> In Fraenkel’s set theory with *Urelemente*, different *Urelemente* were distinct but indistinguishable (any permutation of *Urelemente* could be extended to an automorphism of the whole universe). The formulation “distinct but indistinguishable” might cause some worry, but to us seems a perfectly reasonable expression of the idea of *pure distinction*, *distinction* without any content or prior reason.

with marks on the stick. But establishing a(n injective) function amounts to identifying the points of the source with their images. Equality emerges as a relation – that is, it presupposes and is based on *distinction*. Nobody would ever imagine saying that  $a = a$  if the threat of  $a \neq a$  was not there. This possibility is, from the point of view of pure multiplicities and their relations, the primordial reality: *immediate* things, viewed *only* from the point of their *immediacy*, are different before they become the same.

Of course, this “becoming the same” has only epistemic aspect because proving that  $a = b$  one only discovers the fact, an  $x$ , which is hiding behind the actual representations  $a$  and  $b$ , and has always made  $a = x = b$ . As we observed in 2.2.3.i, especially §§163.ff, equality across *dissociated actualities* is a transcendent fact, a *trace* of earlier unity. This fact cannot be accounted for within the mere *actuality* and identity remains, on the one hand, a hardly questionable (ontological) intuition and, on the other hand, an (epistemic) ideality which ‘has to be constructed’. Likewise for mathematics, which is the science of pure *immediacy*, this relation remains forever as fundamental as undefinable. On the one hand, equality is not axiomatisable – any set of axioms which is valid for the identity relation will also be valid for other relations (congruences, i.e., indistinguishabilities).<sup>360</sup> As Frege says “Since every definition is an identity, identity itself can not be defined.” But, axiomatisable or not, one works with equality and knows its meaning. Equality is a semantic notion: it has to be introduced into the mathematical foundation as a primitive, as if ‘from outside’.

### 3.5 Summarising...

#### 228. *A priori*

The given account may remind of Kantian *a priori* forms providing conditions of possibility of experience. *Distinction* is an event of any experience and, with it, *pure distinction* its *a priori* condition. This, however, is only an analogy of form, in that *pure distinctions* play similar role to *a priori* forms which are not thematical contents of *experience* but necessary aspects underlying any experience. But, unlike Kantian forms, they are themselves *experienced* in the immediacy of *self-consciousness*, in every experience. Beyond that, they do not provide any more specific form of experience, in particular, the temporal and spatial dimension are only related, but much lower aspects of *actual experience*. The main difference, if we were to speak about *a priori* conditions, would concern the fact that they are not independent from *experience* but, on the contrary, are present in every particular experience and are themselves experienced.

Even if mathematical concepts have developed, evolved and proliferated, there is something which makes Phytagorean and modern mathematics *equally* mathematics. This primal ground, reflecting its origin, has proved immutable unlike in any other science. Learning physics we never hear about the Ionic philosophy of nature or Aristotelian principles. But learning mathematics we still go through the theorems of Thales, Phytagoras, Euclid. Even if we go as far back as Egyptian engineering or Chaldean astrology we still find sound *mathematical*, not pre-mathematical calculations. As the contributions to the mathematical knowledge they are as valid, relevant and *mathematical* as the theorems of Gauss, Banach or Skolem. Thus, unlike other sciences which have either gone through the processes of essential changes before reaching their modern form or else appeared only very recently, the character of fundamental mathematical objects has remained unchanged since the very beginning.

This does not, perhaps, prove anything but it indicates that even the most primitive and underdeveloped mathematics is *equally* mathematics as its most advanced forms. It may have different foundations, it may pursue this rather than that branch of inquiry, but it cannot dissociate itself from its origin without ceasing to be mathematics. Mathematics of other intelligent beings might be very different from ours. But to the extent it is mathematics, it would rest on the same, *a priori* origin and, as such, could not contain theorems contradicting the theorems of our

---

<sup>360</sup>This applies to first-order logic. In a sense, but only in a sense, second-order logic allows one to define identity, i.e., force a relational symbol to be interpreted as such. The reservation concerns the need for additional semantic assumptions, in particular, that one works only with the standard model (all subsets of the domain) and not the general models (admitting various choices of the collection of subsets). Then, the definition of identity of individuals amounts to requiring them to be members of exactly the same sets, in particular, the same sets with only one element. Even if technically possible, it seems to leave too many holes (e.g., sameness of all, also one-element sets is presupposed) for a philosopher to agree that identity has thus been defined.

***Abstraction***

All other sciences emerge as a consequence of extracting from the whole human experience some restricted domain – of specific objects or problems. The notions of such a domain may then undergo a gradual abstraction which eventually yields quite abstract entities with which most advanced sciences are occupied. The abstract character of a science is always the end result, never the beginning. But this schema obviously does not work for mathematics. Its original objects have not changed since its beginning. And if we try to elucidate the basic notions of point, number and the like by a reference to the process of abstraction we would have to explain also what made our remote ancestors so intensely interested in just this line of extreme abstraction and made them ignore more or less all others – why did Chaldeans, Egyptians, Greeks carry out this line of abstraction to its very extreme while in all other areas stopped at a very elementary level? Perhaps, simply because nobody had to abstract himself toward the notion of a multiplicity by disregarding more and more properties of actual objects. If the *experience of pure distinction* lies both in the background of our being *and* at the origin of mathematics, then there is no need to make our ancestors so mystically different from us, because there is no need for abstraction at all.

[Number] may well be the most primitive element of order in the human mind [...] Hence it is not such an audacious conclusion after all if we define number psychologically as an *archetype of order* which has become conscious. [...] It is generally believed that numbers were *invented* or thought out by man, [...] but it is equally possible that numbers were *found* or discovered. In that case they are not only concepts but something more – autonomous entities which somehow contain more than just quantities. [...] then on account of their mythological nature they belong to the realm of ‘godlike’ human and animal figures and are just as archetypal as they [...]”<sup>361</sup> In short, “we have a direct awareness of mathematical form as an archetypal structure.”

Abstraction lies only in positing the original intuition of *pure distinction* as an *object* of independent study, in turning this intuition into an explicit representation, if you like, in turning from the origin towards a foundation. Thematic study of mathematics may be difficult and abstract. But it does not mean that its fundamental, original *object* is an abstraction which has nothing to do with *experience*.

***Synthetic and universal***

Mathematics is not only *a priori* but also ‘synthetic’ – it applies to experience, in fact, to *any* experience, simply because it addresses elements present in *any* experience. *Distinction, chaos* and *actuality* are constant aspects of all our experience, knowledge and activity. All experience is *self-conscious* and so with any *distinction* there is associated the awareness of the fact of distinctness, that is, *pure distinction*. Similarly, with the *actuality* of an experience there is given multiplicity, or multiplicities of *pure distinctions* and with *chaos* – their infinity. These intuitions, even if not represented explicitly in mathematical or other concepts, accompany all our experience.

But this universal applicability amounts also to a reduction. Mathematics is applicable to an experience only to the extent we view it through the glasses of *pure distinctions*. Mathematics applied to engineering, to sociology, even to psychology is always the same mathematics and it says equally much (or little) about each area – it says only that much as can be expressed in terms of *pure distinctions*. Counting houses is no different from counting sheep, nor from counting sheep and apples and friends, because counting is always only counting of multiplicities, of points, of *pure distinctions*. We can apply mathematics to any experience only to the extent we are willing to disregard all possible differences of content and consider only differences of number. The ‘synthetic’ character of mathematical enterprise is really the same as its *a priori* character – the fact that experience is an experience only to the extent it is differentiated.

Hence mathematics is ‘synthetic’ and truly universal: not because it can say something about the content of *any* experience but because it does not say anything about such a content – only that each content must be distinguished. As usual, the price for generality is the loss of *concreteness*.

***Timeless***

*Pure distinction*, although present in every experience, is itself liable to be grasped in the most immediate act. *Vagueness* of most *distinctions* is then replaced by the sharpest, most *precise*

---

<sup>361</sup>C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*. The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, §870ff.

rigidity of the fact of distinctness. The whole mathematics, arising around the *pure distinction*, is constructed in terms of *immediacy*. Its world is timeless in the same way as the *object of reflection that it is* – reduced to *immediacy*, dissociated from the temporal dimension of existence.

Every mathematical relation and, in particular, mathematical identity, although of a transcendent, supra-mathematical origin, acquires in mathematics equally timeless character. It is identity of two *immediate givens*, of two points (or objects constructed from such points) residing in their respective, *dissociated immediacies*. Transcendent as it is, it is viewed always and only from the point of these *immediacies*. The  $x$  making  $a = x = b$  is itself a mathematical object which, once identified, becomes prone to the same manipulation as  $a, b$  which gave rise to it. The relation of equality is “frozen” and timeless as are the terms of this relation. It is the opposite of the lived, continuous *unity* of a being which *founds* all the differences of its possible *actualisations*.

232. **Necessary vs. universal**

It might seem that universality accounts also for necessity, that, as Kant meant, “the two are inseparable”. But they are not only separable but very different.

Universality will say “something is always valid”, necessity “something can not be otherwise”. The former is quite a natural concept. If it is empirical, then it is exactly what makes it natural. To some extent everybody makes generalisations and arrives at some universal formulations. Now, one may say “all ashtrays in this room are green” but we should not confuse the syntactic form (the mere presence of the universal quantifier) with universality. Universality involves generality and is concerned with the totality of *the world*. That we always distinguish, that so it is, is a universal statement. But such “so it is” is not sufficient for necessity because necessity is concerned not only with the actual world but with all possible worlds. It cannot merely say what is always the case in *the world*, it also has to exclude its opposite from all possible worlds. Only by confusing the universal quantification over the objects within the world with the universal quantification over the possible worlds, can one confuse universality with necessity.

Since universality is concerned with the actual world and necessity with all possibilities, the former does not imply the latter.

Necessity is thought *de re* – it is a property of objects, relations and states of affairs. Saying “this statement is necessary” we mean “what it claims holds with necessity”. It is the behaviour of objects or some state of affairs which is characterised as necessary. As the paradigmatic example one has always posited the causal relation which holds necessarily between  $x$  and  $y$  if an occurrence of  $x$  is a *sufficient reason* for the occurrence of  $y$ . After Hume’s criticism it seemed impossible to maintain this idea of necessity which was first relegated to the categories of pure reason and, eventually, to the sphere of purely linguistic phenomena.<sup>362</sup> In this tradition, it is the analyticity of judgments which is supposed to account for all possible necessity – of judgments, of course. If such judgments existed they would be necessary by being void of all real content, by being true for purely linguistic reasons of mere meaning of terms. We could agree that necessity implies removal of the actual content but not that it is a purely linguistic phenomenon. It is related to our understanding but not as if this required language and opposed *experience*. It is related to all the *actual objects* but only to the extent these are reduced to the ideal *immediacy*, namely, to the contentless *pure distinctions*.

233. Universality involves not only “for all  $x$ ” but also a kind of generality, totality of *the world*. Necessity, concerned with all possible worlds, would thus imply universality. But this is only a superficial, formal implication. Necessity does not require any generality. “In the experiment which started at the Ridiculous Labs, CA, USA, on the 26th February, at 14:03’52”:18”, the generated positron had to turn left, the electron had to make a U-turn and, colliding, they had to annihilate.” Without making any claims to the physical plausibility of this statement – it says that something was necessary. It says that no matter what, given the above conditions things could not have happened otherwise. But one could hardly call it a universal statement. Replacing “the generated positron” with “any positron which might have been generated at this point” would only change the syntax giving at most a resemblance of generality.

In fact, it is only by designating more and more specific conditions, by isolating a situation

<sup>362</sup>This whole development is present already in Ockham. Following the assumption of exclusive reality of dissociated particulars, he argues for purely mental character of causality (as of any other universal relation), W. Ockham, *Quodlibeta II:9, IV:1, VI:12*, and arrives at the impossibility of demonstrating any causal relations, W. Ockham, *Sentences II:4-5.i* [after E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*.... p.497, footnote 27].

or an *object* and excluding the possibility of interference from the unpredictable surroundings that we arrive at the laws which we consider necessary. If the result above is claimed to hold with necessity *only* because there is a general law saying that any positron and any electron will necessarily annihilate under given conditions, then it is just another level of the same – isolating and narrowing conditions to specify sufficient reasons for some effect. The “any” may give an impression of generality but it is only an impression. This apparent generality merely hides the highly particular definitions of electron, positron, their specific properties, in addition to the ‘given conditions’, to the ‘other things being equal’ which underlies every claim to necessity.

The way to necessity goes via increased precision and specialisation, i.e., in the opposite direction than the way to universality. The more content, the less necessity. The richer the perception of a situation, the more possibilities it unveils, the less tractable and the more difficult to control it becomes. And hence the attempts to design a grand theory of everything, to subsume the whole world under the rule of necessary laws impoverish the world. Certainly, some parts of the world can be reduced to simple entities which are prone to the descriptions in terms of the necessary. (Such descriptions seem always to conjure the possibility of control.) But the dangerous impoverishment occurs when the drive is uninhibited, when it is the drive to defeat everything escaping control. Only disappearance of content makes perfect necessity possible.

The obvious attempt to obtain necessity seems thus to look for judgments with no content. Tautologies and contradictions were suggested but then one should, perhaps, include also meaningless statements having no content. Besides, even the non-contradiction principle is not necessary unless one assumes appropriate reduction of the domain of discourse. This reduction goes in the direction of *immediacy* and ends with mathematics. The alternative (to the analytical necessity of empty statements) is to remove all content from the considered objects, leaving only the ultimate minimum of precise alternatives: ‘yes’ or ‘no’, a *pure distinction*. Necessity amounts to removing possibilities and the limit of this process is when only one possibility remains. But to be able to exclude possibilities with full obviousness and precision, these must be first precisely given. Necessity of mathematical results is only another side of their ultimate precision and is based exclusively on the character of the fundamental objects – the ultimately reduced, most *immediate*, entirely contentless *pure distinctions*, devoid of any interfering context, in the pure isolation of ‘all other things being equal’. The source of this necessity is the resulting pure bivalence, the ultimate *tertium non datur*, the absolute character of negation which, viewed within pure *immediacy* allows two and only two alternatives, ‘being’ or ‘not-being’, ‘yes’ or ‘no’.<sup>363</sup>

Bivalent logic with non-contradiction principle, as suggested in §192, is associated with the level of *immediacy* and now we encounter also necessity as yet another aspect of this *nexus*. It springs from the idea that things could not possibly be different, the idea residing in the residual point of ‘now’, where there is only what there is, ultimately dissociated from the surroundings and thus as unavoidable and necessary as it is arbitrary and spontaneous. The site of necessity is *immediacy* and attempts to extend it beyond this narrow horizon fail rather miserably, as Hume has shown.<sup>364</sup> In particular, they must first reduce the objects of interest to the residual points, and such a reduction is seldom satisfactory. Furthermore, most imaginable alternatives, i.e., most possible

---

<sup>363</sup>  $7 + 5 = 12$  is, as Kant argues, synthetic ( $12$  is not defined as, nor included in,  $7 + 5$ ) and necessary judgment. What makes it necessarily true is not any mere linguistic convention, although it is the meaning of the involved terms and operations. Its necessity lies in the fact that the only other possibility,  $7 + 5 \neq 12$ , not only does not obtain but also, given the (univocal and *precise!*) meanings of the involved terms and operations cannot possibly obtain. Of course, in more advanced constructions, several possibilities can obtain. But even then one has the complete overview and a proof amounts to excluding all possibilities except one. A typical mistake in a proof is overlooking one possibility, one case which does obtain and yields another final result.

Emphasizing the fundamental role of bivalence in mathematics we do not, of course, imply that, for instance, either continuum hypothesis or its negation must follow from ZF(C) or that, in general, given a mathematical context every possible question must have a unique answer. Such undetermined questions concern advanced mathematical constructions and not the original objects with which we are dealing here and which comprise only natural numbers and basic geometrical intuitions. Already fractions, not to mention real numbers, represent advanced constructions going far beyond the origin.

<sup>364</sup> Let us remember that his analyses do not affect mathematical results. What “mathematics concludes, in regard to such things as numbers, proportions and figures is indubitably true and cannot be otherwise” [John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*. II:C.13] To the possible story-tellers, who would try to claim that not only natural science but even mathematics is only yet another way of telling a story, one could say that although mistakes in proofs are possible and we may be uncertain whether a proof stretching over tens of pages or one supported by unverified computer calculations is correct, the mathematical result itself is always stated as necessary. Fallibility of the actual criteria of certainty does not contradict the ultimate necessity of the correct results.

worlds are completely irrelevant, existentially uninteresting, and this is what makes necessity an ‘unnatural’, almost inhuman property. Implausibility of claiming that something could not be otherwise is also the reason for the almost instinctive rejection – at least by the common sense – of all sophisticated arguments produced in favour of determinism.

Mathematical statements are not empty tautologies.<sup>365</sup> Perhaps, one could develop an apparatus making  $1 \neq 2$  an empty statement. For our part it seems hard to imagine how one could even start doing this without the prior *distinction* between one • and another •, without the *experience* (not an *experience!*) of  $\neq$ . Mathematical propositions tell us the story of the objects they describe. Their necessity follows not from their emptiness but from the emptiness of these object. It does not hide in any formal properties of the proof techniques or particular axiomatisations. All such techniques have equally necessary character because they all have to conform to the standards of *immediate univocity* set up by their objects. The fact that a mathematical theorem is either true or false mimics only the contentless duality of the *pure distinction*. It is the ultimate poverty of mathematical objects which accounts for their necessity.

235. There are levels or degrees of approximation to pure *immediacy*, that is, degrees of abstraction from the *concrete* content, and hence degrees of necessity – objects may be more or less abstract, depending on how close they come to the level of *immediacy*. Consider the increase of ‘real’ content in passing from mathematics to physics, then to biology, from biology to history, from sociology to literature. This increase is clearly accompanied by the decreasing degree of necessary determinations or, if you allow, by the increase of freedom. It is no coincidence that the scientific and philosophical attempts to establish a system of necessary laws end up with abstract statements. But the statements are abstract not because they are empty tautologies – they are abstract because they had to dispense with most of the *concrete* content of the described objects. The search for the infallible laws leads sciences to construe their objects in a more and more simple and elementary fashion because necessity requires *precision*, that is, approximation to *immediacy*, reduction of the *concrete* content. It is always as tempting to postulate necessity – in form of sufficient reasons, binding explanations, inviolable laws of nature or reason... – as it is hard to justify such postulates. For to justify them one has to reduce everything to some form of mathematics. Unfortunately, one attempts such reductions not only in physics or quantum mechanics but in most sciences or, at least, what one tries to call “science”. Not only natural sciences but also economy, sociology, even psychology display the symptoms of the mathematical disease. The mathematical point, the vanishing (or rather the barely appearing) indication of something-being-there, the shadow of perfect atom is the constant ideal of the knights of necessity.

\* \* \*

236. “[O]ur only approach to divine things is through symbols [and] we can *appropriately* use mathematical signs because of their incorruptible certitude.”<sup>366</sup> We can use them appropriately because their signification is limited to the *immediacy* of *pure distinctions*, where *sign* and *signified* coincide. But this appropriateness is exhausted by that. According to Hugo Steinhaus, “mathematics is the science of objects which do not exist”. Indeed, the limit of *immediacy* is the point where objects cease to exist, cease to be objects and become mere points.<sup>367</sup> Applying mathematics to anything demands that we look at the thing as a mere pure difference, a mere point of distinction. In spite of attempts to reduce various sciences to a mathematical dimension, we do not really think that it is entirely meaningful to transfer the necessity and certitude of mathematics to other domains of experience. In fact, attempting such a reduction, we immediately realise that it is just that: a reduction. Mathematics captures and elaborates the fundamental aspect of experience, the fact of *distinguishing*. This may serve as a source of powerful analogies and useful similes. The ‘emptiness’ of mathematical objects will always remain on the border of mysticism and resonate deeply underneath the possible suspicions about tautological emptiness of mathematical results. The emptiness of objective content, the *purity* of *distinctions*, lifts it above all *experience* and makes it almost as empty as its closest neighbour, *nothingness* itself. But the beginning does not

<sup>365</sup>Perhaps, they are tautologies, if these be defined as necessarily true statements.

<sup>366</sup>Nicholas of Cusa, *On Sacred Ignorance*. I:11.§32

<sup>367</sup>Bovelles described creature as “beings which are not.” [C. de Bovelles, *De nihilo*. p.75,97 [after J. Miernowski, *God-Nothingness*. p.91]] Misusing the analogy of expression, mathematics applies then to all creature; to the most fundamental, albeit very limited aspect of it.

contain the end, the *original virtuality* does not determine *actuality*. It is not so that “[b]y number, a way is had, to the searching out and understanding of every thyng, hable to be knownen.”<sup>368</sup> Trying to ‘Pythagorise and philosophise by mathematics’ alone ends, if not in the labyrinths of numerology, then at a philosophical desert, as great as it is empty. With respect to *concrete* experience, the mathematical images, built atop contentless *objects*, will always remain only, and only at best, analogies and similes.

---

<sup>368</sup>G. P. della Mirandola, *Conclusions or 900 Theses*. Mathematical Conclusions:11 (*Conclusiones de mathematicis secundum opinionem propriam, numero LXXXV*), as quoted in J. Dee, *The Mathematicall Praeface to the Elements....*



“Because the soul has the potentiality of knowing all things,  
it never rests until it comes to the first image where all things  
are one. There it rests, there in God.”

Eckhart<sup>1</sup>

## Book III (of relevance)

# Visible and Invisible

We live among things which we control and use for our purposes, among things and institutions built to perform definite functions. But we live surrounded by things which are ‘greater than us’, things which are not *totalities* and cannot be caught in a network of *precise concepts*. These ‘things’, slipping out of our grasp and control are not, however, outside our reach, they are not inaccessible infinities ‘in themselves’. They too are *distinctions* which have been made after we were *born* and are part of our experience. They are announced by various *signs* and by all the traces which permeate every *actuality*. They are *present*, albeit never as entirely *actual*, *precise* and fully exhausted *objects of reflection*.

“Know that the knowable things are of two kinds. Some can be described by means of definitions, while others can not be defined.”<sup>2</sup> In the most mundane sense, the *invisibles* are what “can not be defined”, what can not be encircled within the *horizon of actuality*. Speaking of love as the paramount example of such an undefinable experience, Ibn‘Arabi continues “It is known by him in whom it lives and whose object it becomes, while the person is unable to understand its nature nor negate its reality.”<sup>3</sup> Inability to grasp ‘what’ does not exclude perfect awareness of *that*. In the eventual limit, *invisibles* dissolve in the mere *that* of the *origin*, leaving all ‘what’s to the finitude of understanding. Even if consciousness notices some *invisibles*, it has completely different character from the thematic consciousness of a *visible* content. *Invisibles* present themselves always as essentially *transcending the actual consciousness*, as inexhaustible by it. They are experienced, so to speak, at the edge of eternity.

“Now the created soul of man hath [...] two eyes. The one is the power of seeing into eternity, the other of seeing into time and the creatures, of perceiving how they differ from each other [...], of giving life and needful things to the body, and ordering and governing it for the best.”<sup>4</sup> An individual is a borderline between *visible* and *invisible* – this is the existential situation. It is irrevocable and does not depend on anything particular, on the level of his understanding, on the scope of his knowledge, on his character or life experience. Yet it is not, for this reason, formal, it is not related to the concrete qualities of different lives as form is (supposed to relate) to matter. It is, in fact, experienced through and through, encircling the horizon within which this particular life, as well as every other life, unfolds. The *invisibles* present in every *actuality* are what give it its full, lived *concreteness*. All concrete *experiences* are woven into the interplay of the *visible* and *invisible*. No matter to which level one directs *reflection*, no matter what are the predominant feelings and inspirations of one’s life, this life’s fundamental character is determined by the experience and attitude toward the sphere of *invisible* and *visible*, by the way in which one experiences and moulds the borderline between them.

<sup>1</sup> *German Sermons*, Ac. XII:11 [J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., *Meister Eckhart...* I, pp.48-57; B. McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart...* 3, pp.244-246]

<sup>2</sup> M. Ibn‘Arabi, *The Treatise on Love*. III:\$25

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Theologia Germanica*. VII. There are multiple examples of apparently similar duality, as e.g.: “I am a member of two orders: the one purely spiritual, in which I rule by my will alone; the other sensuous, in which I operate by my deed.” [J. G. Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*. III:p.140] In our terms, these two orders are both within the sphere of *visibility*. Similarly, Hugh of St. Victor distinguished the ‘eye of the flesh’, by which we perceive external world and the ‘eye of the reason’, by which we attain knowledge of ourselves. But with him both were, in turn, distinct from the ‘eye of contemplation’, which allows us to achieve knowledge of things *above us*.

This is the *existential* situation. The *invisible* is not something which is merely “not known”. Knowledge, especially in the philosophical tradition, might have functioned as an image of this situation, where reason was placed between the ‘known’ and ‘unknown’. But it is a poor analogy. The distinction ‘known’–‘unknown’ places us at the level of *actuality*, it carries the character of contradiction, of an absolute opposition and, moreover, of *objectivistic attitude* – the ‘unknown’ is either irrelevant emptiness or a determinate ‘knowable’. For a knowledge oriented person, it seems important what he knows and, possibly, what he does not know but would like to know. This positivistic element veils completely (though not necessarily) the fact which is important: that no matter how much and what one knows, it is always limited and surrounded by the immovable horizon of the ‘unknown’. This fact, trivial as it is, has existential import.

Being a borderline is a concrete expression of *existential confrontation*. It is not merely formal but thoroughly *concrete* because man, transcending himself, lives only his own limits. The confrontation itself is never *actually experienced*, is never ‘given’ as an object of adequate understanding; it manifests itself as the constant presence of something above, witnessed to by occasional *signs* and constant *traces* connecting what is *actually visible* to its *invisible* origins. Being a borderline is a concrete expression of *existence as participation* – perhaps not yet a *concrete participation*, which consists in *actually being* on the trace, but at first only a simple participation of *mere intimation* of the trace, *mere intimation* of being surrounded by *invisibles* which remain *dissociated* from their *signs*, remote and not present concretely. Remoteness, the distance is reflected as *thirst* – and when pushed to the extreme *dissociation*, even as despair – of the *soul*, for “the desire for the bliss, which she had lost, remained with her even after the Fall.”<sup>5</sup>

## 1 Thirst

3. Young people look hopefully into the future which is like a huge promise of the whole world – and thirst for its coming. Adults keep putting the last brick on the construction they have been rising all the time, the last detail needed to complete the perfect totality – and having put it, find another one which needs to be put, but only one, the last one, and then another... Or else, they throw dim looks far away, to the places of the next visit on the other end of the earth, to the remote, half real places they can hardly imagine, like the magical atmosphere of the childhood home. Old people thirst only for the thirst of their youth; or, perhaps, for the tranquility of withdrawal from the actuality. The poor thirst for the easiness of affluence and the rich for the resistance of the world and matter without which, so it seems, the reality dissolves in decadence. As Goethe says, “man thirsts constantly for what he is not.” We are never entirely satisfied with our achievements, and we are never entirely satisfied with whatever we obtain from gratuitous generosity. And if one rests satisfied, when one stops thirsting, it is said that he has lost the taste for life.

“We are as if we were not.”<sup>6</sup> There is something which enters our experience only as *thirst*; it is not longing for anything specific, even if in most situations one will fill the objectless character of this *thirst* with something graspable, will give it a name, and hence a goal. But it is not longing for..., not a thirst for... – it is simply *thirst*, without any object, without any goal. True goals remain hidden until they are reached.

4. *Thirst* does not show anything visible; if we were to talk about its correlate, its noematic intention, it could only be *nothingness*; *nothing* appearing through the entirely negative noesis, the experience of lack, perhaps even a loss. Yet, this seemingly negative noesis, this apparent *nothingness*, has a thoroughly positive character. For *thirst* announces something which – by the very fact of being *thirsted* for – represents some good, and – by being *thirsted* for indefinitely and undefinably, incessantly and indelibly – perhaps something *absolutely* good. It might seem that what is so announced remains ‘absent’ and that the whole announcement amounts to nothing but announcing its ‘absence’. The negative experiential content, ‘absence’, may indeed seem to be not merely an analogical *modus significandi*, but strangely inadequate way of presenting the intended, fully positive *res significata*. “Not understanding, although they have heard, they are like deaf. The proverb bears witness to them: «Present yet absent.»”<sup>7</sup> For all that appears negative and

---

<sup>5</sup>J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. IV:777C-D

<sup>6</sup>Heraclitus DK 22B49a

<sup>7</sup>Heraclitus DK 22B34

inadequate only when we expect things, *objects*, ‘substances’, visible images, in short, *actualities*. For only then we consider *non-actuality* to be an ‘absence’, a lack. This ‘absence’, however, is a thoroughly positive *presence*, and *thirst*, this sense of incompleteness, is the genuine bridge over the borderline separating *this* and *another world*. “That our good is There is shown by the very love inborn with the soul; [...] the soul, other than God but sprung from Him, must needs love.”<sup>8</sup> And thus ‘remembering’, one keeps looking. “Sometimes I feel as if I were approaching happiness and I stand before a flower that blossoms through an old stone wall and I am unable to draw nearer. I am left with the feeling of always waiting for happiness, and everything is suddenly diminished by the melancholy of having once being able to achieve that joy.”<sup>9</sup> This remembrance of apparent loss, this *thirst*, ‘natural love’ and desire of ‘Something’, is the first form of *invisible presence* in *actual experience*. Before elaborating this point, a few *impressions*.

### The moods of silence

“Silence is a fence around wisdom”<sup>10</sup> says Maimonides. Nowhere, nowhere and never happens more than in a moment of silence – for silence is the voice of God. “I am the taste of living waters and the light of the sun and the moon [...], sound in silence [...] / I am the silence of hidden mysteries; and I am the knowledge of those who know.”<sup>11</sup> But used to the voices, one cannot hear silence, and thus searching for visible signs one keeps *thirsting* for what *transcends* them.

*Then Theotormon broke his silence, and he answered:*

*"Tell me what is the night or day to one o'erflowd with woe?  
Tell me what is a thought? & of what substance is it made?  
Tell me what is a joy? & in what gardens do joys grow?  
And in what rivers swim the sorrows? and upon what mountains  
Wave shadows of discontent? and in what houses dwell the wretched  
Drunken with woe, forgotten, and shut up from cold despair?*

*Tell me where dwell the thoughts, forgotten till thou call them forth?  
Tell me where dwell the joys of old! & where the ancient loves?  
And when will they renew again & the night of oblivion past?  
That I might traverse times & spaces far remote and bring  
Comforts into a present sorrow and a night of pain.  
Where goest thou, O thought? to what remote land is thy flight?  
If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction  
Wilt thou bring comforts on thy wings and dews and honey and balm,  
Or poison from the desert wilds, from the eyes of the envier?"<sup>12</sup>*

Have you ever felt the constancy of a pain, vague and indefinite or, perhaps, clean-cut and if not 5. with a known source, then at least with a clearly recognisable target, pain which did not leave any space for hope, whose intensity was spread over the soul or rooted in the body so that no point was adequate to begin recovery in which you could trust? Have you? Pain which might have lasted for years so that, eventually, it became a companion, almost a friend, on whom you could rely, who you could be sure will visit you again, but whom you never wished to meet directly, whom you always tried to avoid, pretending that you are not at home, whenever the doorbell rang.

Have you ever met a dark moment of dark thoughts, in the middle of a restless night of despair? 6. The emptiness of crowded streets, unreal cities, wastelands? Have you ever been at the outermost cliffs, far from Dover, not peaceful coast of sunny Californian Pacific, but remote and desolate, stony beaches of Faroe Islands, empty, like mathematical line curved in the frozen magma of an Icelandic mountain, in the steepness of a Norwegian fiord, stone under ice, blown with the wind, and waves, not singing, chanting perhaps, but not enchanting, dividing the waves, those which stay, and those which return... unceasingly, without purpose...

Have you ever felt the emptiness of infinite longing, the emptiness which filled the whole world, 7.

<sup>8</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:9.9

<sup>9</sup>L. Salomé, *You Alone are Real to Me*. Rilke's letter from 16.03.1914, p.66

<sup>10</sup>M. Maimonides, *Laws Concerning Character Traits*.

<sup>11</sup>*The Bhagavad-Gita*. VII:8/X:38

<sup>12</sup>W. Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. In Blake's poetry, Theotormon represents thirst, desire which, when suppressed and restrained, turns into envy or greed.

the whole life, eventually, the whole universe with the unbearable beauty of its silence. Have you? The emptiness which does not negate the things of this world but which presses its presence between them, which surrounds them with full respect and recognition, and yet...makes them all appear insignificant, that is, disappear. The emptiness which is not void, which is not absence but, on the contrary, the fact, the feeling, the presence which meets the longing at the horizon where the ineffable dawns, and thus, where it languishes in calm. The emptiness which is all and only correlate of this longing, because you know that you are not having a yen for this or that, for a better house, nor for a nicer company, for more success, nor for more happiness. Such things, real and satisfying as they might be, would not suffice. You are not longing for anything, and yet you are longing...This is not a longing for the impossible, rather, an impossible longing, often, aroused by a minor thing, an inspiringly resigned tune of Celtic quietude, Irish flute, by a stormy breeze on an empty beach boulevard among the faded tables and withered benches, by the light of the moon diminishing in the dark waters of an evening lake, by a passing woman reminding you of the impossibility of Love. But these are only signs, impressions, psychological reminders.

And all the good dreams, understood or not, dreams of foreign lands, of remote islands, of shiny future, believed and unbelievable. Day-dreams of the ultimate fulfillments, hardly admitted and only vaguely felt, with unrecognisable contents though recurring moods, arising in a morning from the ashes left by the nightmares of their failures. All the good, beautiful dreams, the more precise the less possible, never matched by reality and yet constant and unshaken, impossible to retain, impossible to forget.

Dreamer, dreamer, what do you dream of?

8. Have you ever felt the restlessness of soul which, although apparently should be happy and has no reasons for dissatisfaction, does not find calm and rest in any of its achievements, in any of the joys and pleasanties it has encountered? Have you? Have you ever felt that everything is in perfect order, so that it hardly could be better or neater, that you have everything you wanted and yet, something is missing, that you have nothing to complain about and yet ...

And if you felt it, haven't you then tried either to find something which *actually* was missing to fill the gap, or else decided to do something which could occupy your mind and your hands, which could at least serve some useful, even if tiny, purpose?

9. Under all the attempts to think that the meaning is more specific, that there was a goal, that all is about something more definite, there hides unquenchable *thirst*. Awaiting new things, important events, the most significant solutions, we flirt with time, yearning for eternity. And the deeper we yearn, the more intensely we flirt. It seems that a "mere trifle consoles us, for a mere trifle distresses us."<sup>13</sup> But any moment devoid of the hope of eternity becomes a desperate expectation of the next moment. One may reach the point where mere novelty, multiplication and "increase are the highest and only goal", although even the preachers of blind differentiation know that this is usually called "cancer". The *thirst* is not for this or that, and so it can not be quenched by anything, least of all, by *more* of anything. It may turn into incessant and restless search, into constant attempts to acquire *more* or experience something new, but "avarice is serving the idols". The *more* ends up in a stupefying perplexity, like the oversensitivity of an autist leads to a shutdown. The *more*, the less... Any attempt to quiet *thirst* with this or that will only make its presence more intense. The multitude of distractions may help to survive a day, a week, a year, but it only breeds more *thirst*. In fact, *thirst* becomes the stronger, the weaker any feeling of its presence, the less *visible signs* announcing it. All its *signs* tend to get hidden under *more* and *more* goals, activities, experiences, novelties. But hiding the *signs* does not help against *thirst* which now starts emanating from that which intended, and initially even managed, to obscure it. "More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul, less than All cannot satisfy Man."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>B. Pascal, *Pensées*. II:136

<sup>14</sup>W. Blake, *There is no natural religion*. II

### 1.1.1. Search

The soul “never rests until it comes to the first image...” says Eckhart<sup>16</sup>, and this lack of rest may easily become a search – not any longer a search for this or that, but a search for ... God? Yet “there is truly no searching for God, for there is *nothing* where one could find him.”<sup>17</sup> The search is but the recognition of the lack, only the indefinite and *clear thirst*. Young, adult or old, successful or damned, nobody lives without this *thirst* and nobody can live without it. But real is exactly that without which one can not live. The *thirst* announces the presence of the most real aspect of our whole experience, but it is not easy either to realise or to accept it.

*Thirst* is already a search, but it does not know for what. Of course, we “all desire happiness with one will,”<sup>18</sup> we are looking for *vita beata*, for the ‘highest good’, for ‘paradise’... But what does all that mean? – specifically, concretely, precisely? Indeed, *nothing* in particular. So yearning for eternity we flirt with time, unable to find *invisibles* we keep looking for this or that, and end up with mere *signs*, for only what is *visible* can be searched for, found and possessed. We replace *thirst* with *thirst* for Being, then *thirst* for Being with *thirst* for truth, *thirst* for truth with *thirst* for understanding, *thirst* for understanding with *thirst* for recognition; we want to think that some form of paradise on earth is possible, and end up constructing totalitarian monstrosities; we recognise the ever present, the ‘unavowed theologeme’ and end up mixing faith, messianicity with ‘democracy to come’ and other socio-political fantasies, which criticize such earlier fantasies only by turning in the opposite direction along *the same* line... An *idol* is a finite, relative thing made absolute, a *visible* thing used to suppress the *thirst* – as it often may seem, to quench it. “What idol actually attempts to erase is the remoteness, the distance separating us from divinity... Filling this gap, the idol presses itself on us as divinity, confirms it and eventually degenerates.”<sup>19</sup> In search of paradise, we find *idols*; *thirsting* to the woods, we raise cities, and to convince ourselves that this is enough we *idolise* them the more, the less calm they bring and the stronger our suspicion of their insufficiency.

A vague sense of some loss, the loss of something we do not know precisely what is, something like ... paradise, some happy state, a natural dwelling place – the sense of such a loss is a form of *thirst*, too. But we are not supposed to lose, and even if we do, we lose only what is ours. So “who can yet believe, though after loss, // That all these puissant legions, whose exile//Hath emptied heaven, shall fail to re-ascend, // Self-raised, and repossess their native seat?”<sup>20</sup> Humans deserve ... well, what? It is not quite clear, but no matter what “their native seat” might be, an indication of any metaphysical ‘deserving’ or ‘entitlement’ will not, eventually, stop before the highest unimaginable – ‘paradise’, ‘happiness’, ‘salvation’... Entitled to repossession of the lost seat, “[l]et us disdain things of earth, hold as little worth even the astral orders and, putting behind us all the things of this world, hasten to that court beyond the world, closest to the most exalted Godhead. There, as the sacred mysteries tell us, the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones occupy the first places; but, unable to yield to them, and impatient of any second place, let us emulate their dignity and glory. And, if we will it, we shall be inferior to them in nothing.”<sup>21</sup> Although one might emphasize the calls to transcend the merely human conditions present in *The Oration*, its tone is that of inspired Cabala, or in more ordinary terms, of the unrestricted ‘humanistic’ optimism – entitled self-sufficiency, that is, *pride*. What it veils, or rather what it does not unveil, is that its search for paradise, “impatient of any second place”, must evoke numerology or Cabalistic practices, magic or spiritualistic media, in order to convince itself of the sufficiency of human efforts – precisely because this sufficiency is not given and has to rely on magical devices,

<sup>15</sup> *The sickness unto death* I:C.B.b.α.1

<sup>16</sup> Also Augustine’s opening remark that “our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee” [St. Augustine, *Confessions*. I:1] is a more psychologically appealing variant of the biblical (and rather moralistically sounding) “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” [Mrk. VIII:36; Mt. XVIII:26]

<sup>17</sup> M. Buber, *I and You*. III.

<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine, *On The Holy Trinity*. XIII:4.§7. [“the will to obtain and retain blessedness is one in all”]

<sup>19</sup> J. L. Marion, *Idol and Distance*. [after M.-A. Ouaknin, *Ouvertures hassidiques*, p.106]

<sup>20</sup> J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*. I:631-634 [spoken by Satan]

<sup>21</sup> G. P. della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

precisely because everything originates from the sense of loss, or only lack, which at a deeper level feels irreparable.

12. Let us emphasize: search for paradise is totally well meant and involves only good intentions; no pride, no offense is intended. The whole world is full of good intentions, and the best of them are to ensure paradise – for oneself, for family, for others... “I would like my love to embrace the whole mankind, to warm it and clean it from the dirt of modern life [...] Often it seems to me that even mother does not love children as warmly as I do.”<sup>22</sup> It may seem strange that such feelings might have underlined the activities of “the bloody Feliks” Dzierżyński, one of the main architects of the communistic terror in Russia. But sympathy and compassion for *X* can easily involve hatred, even cruelty, towards *Y*, if only the latter is perceived as being guilty of the former’s misery. And if this misery is ultimate evil, so the guilt is inexcusable and deserves most cruel punishment. *Idols, idols...*

Any idealised society (where justice, equality and happiness rule over human imperfections and sense of incompleteness) is an *idol*, any deep and genuine dream of it a clear *sign of alienation*, and any attempts to construct it are guaranteed to end up the way they always used to end. Hell is paved with good intentions and those who end up there are almost exclusively those who have looked all too intensely for paradise. An infinitely thin line separates all too good intentions from all too ambitious goals. “Those who seek gold dig much earth and find little.”<sup>23</sup> Few, if any people ever commit crimes in order to achieve evil. There is always some good which motivates even the worst deeds. But exaggerated intensity in digging for some good witnesses rather to its opposite. The higher and the greater is the good claimed to ‘motivate and explain’ a particular act, the deeper is *idolatry* and, usually, the more terrifying result. Good, like wisdom, can enlighten but not explain. Particular acts are never *visibly* traceable, not to say necessary, consequences of any higher good. It is only conflation of the highest good with the *visible* form of an *idol* which may seem to dictate with necessity any definite *acts*, as it turns the infinite *love* into activism, religiosity into moralism, *commands* into directives, and *thirst* into lack to be filled with *visible* efforts.

An *idol* is a *sign of loss*, of a broken chain with the *origin, alienation*. *Thirst* experienced as mere thirst, mere loss, which grows into unacceptable pain and searches only for ever new *visible* tranquilizers – is the *sign of invisible rebellion* which, making one look for paradise, directs one to hell. The initial voice of this rebellion calls to an active open war which, in more *visible* terms, means only intensified activity; not as yet any evil will but a blind and restless, no matter how apparently purposeful, search capable only of rising *idols*. No pride nor offense is intended, at least none can be seen, but their *invisible* seeds have already started germinating...

### 1.1.2. The circle of despair

Attachment to *idols* only increases *thirst* – the more we believe that it has disappeared and the less we feel it, the more *present* it becomes. Whether we actually feel it or not, whether we have any actual *signs* of it or not, we all the time know its *presence* – at best, we can only keep it at the threshold of *actuality*, for some time... Psychoanalyst could perhaps say that we suppress it, but it is not a simple game of conscious and unconscious. It is *present* and as such not suppressed. It lends all its power to our *idols* – the more intense and unbearable its *presence*, the more absolute power has to be and is ascribed to the current *idols*.

But less than All cannot satisfy man. We search for and find more things and matters to consider, more goals to achieve, more intensity and engagement, more power in lesser gods – but insatiability, or avarice, is still only serving the *idols*. Behind the circle of *more*, behind the horizon of *visibility*, there lurks already emptiness of despair. As always, it is not critical whether it enters the sphere of *actuality* and consciousness, or not – what matters is its very *presence*. One need not know that one despairs to despair. But knowing that one does may intensify the despair.

13. *Idolatry* is already a form of despair. But despair intensifies when one loses the faith in one’s *idols* which until now have been helping against the *thirst*, and then realises that all the *idols* are only images, masks, lies offering false promises and hopes. It is a meeting with *nothingness* under

---

<sup>22</sup> J. Smaga, *The Birth and Fall of the Empire, CCCP 1917-1991*. p.31 [after J. Tischner, *The Controversy about Man's Existence*.p.45]

<sup>23</sup> Heraclitus DK 22B22

the spell of visibility, and hence only in its negative character, as emptiness, pure void. *Idols* had seemed to be something or at least to hide somebody. Some face was expected behind their masks, like the unreachable goals used to absolutise the relative, or the ultimate and *visible* goals used to justify the unjustifiable. But now, when all the masks have fallen, no face appears – and bare emptiness stares into one's face. One tries to fill it with this or that, with some old or new *idol*, with work, fascinations or orgies, eventually also to pretend that, since *actually* nothing has happened so nothing has happened really. But void of *nothingness* is not like an empty glass and can not be filled with anything. One is bound to begin to live through, if not also realise, the fact “that there is no truth, that there is no absolute character of things, no ‘thing in itself’” and “that all faith, all accepting as truth is by necessity a falsehood: for there is no such thing as the true world.”<sup>24</sup> Admitting this ultimate indifference of the world, its aloofness which one still resists to take as enmity, is often misunderstood as an act of intellectual honesty. But it is only an act of existential despair.

One may try some more desperate acts. Ixion, having fallen in love with Hera, dreams of possessing her and makes successful advances (in some versions, Centaurs are the offspring resulting from their intercourse). His boasting of having had slept with a goddess is, however, a result of an illusion: he slept with a cloud which Zeus created in resemblance of Hera. Thus, trying to reach a goddess, he catches the air and, as a punishment, he is bound to a wheel on which he is whirled by winds for all eternity. Heaven is, according to the Greeks, always a *gift* from gods. The vanity of any attempts to reach it by one's own means recurs with figures like Bellerophon, Icarus, Prometheus.

Such attempts, although deserving further punishment from gods, are themselves *signs* of already being in despair. The time spent on unsuccessful attempts to escape begins gradually to suggest: there is no escape! One may try to look for reasons and explanations, that is, for excuses and the guilty ones (“Hell is the others!” cries Sartre behind the *Closed doors*<sup>25</sup>), one may confront one's own sinfulness (“Angst discovers freedom but this is the same as discovery of sin”<sup>26</sup>), but all that does not change anything: from emptiness, where there are no walls, there is no exit either. The impossibility is eternal.

Proper despair is to surrender to despair. As no exit is *visible*, one is doomed for remaining inside forever. “Inside”? But inside of what? There is only emptiness around. Yet the walls of emptiness create the most terrifying ‘inside’ – they isolate and *alienate* making man dwell “in desolate cities, and in houses which no man inhabiteth, which are ready to become heaps.”<sup>27</sup> *Alienation*, the apparent freedom of empty nothingness is exactly the inescapable damnation – in one: accusation, trial and conviction. One remains ‘inside’ the imaginations and hopes of *visibility*. Their experienced and clearly known insufficiency to bring any consolation testifies to some ‘outside’. But there is only emptiness, so any ‘outside’ is impossible. It is, it must be because one needs it so much, it must be real because one cannot live without it – and yet it is impossible that it is.

To surrender to despair is to say *No* to the possibility of something being there, ‘outside’. Not only there is no *visible* exit, but there is no exit whatsoever because there is nothing toward which one could exit. “Also let a man mark, when he is in this hell, nothing may console him; and he cannot believe that he shall ever be released or comforted.”<sup>28</sup> As there is no hope of exit, as all we confront is the eventual void, the “final hope//Is flat despair: we must exasperate//The almighty victor to spend all his rage,//And that must end us, that must be our cure –//To be no more; sad cure,”<sup>29</sup> The circle of despair is self-strengthening as, accepting the impossibility of exit, one begins to despair over one's own despairing. Hell has no end in time, it is ‘eternal’. “Let us think

<sup>24</sup>F. Nietzsche, *Notes about Nihilism*. XII:9.35 and XII:9.41 [after G. Sowiński, ed., *Around Nihilism*.]

<sup>25</sup>The US title of the play was *No Exit*.

<sup>26</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*. V [modified]

<sup>27</sup>Job XV:28

<sup>28</sup>*Theologia Germanica*. XI. “He shall not depart out of darkness; the flame shall dry up his branches, and by the breath of his mouth shall he go away. Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompense.” [Job XV:30-31] In a much more profane language, “there is, alas, the loneliness which is without any hope of compensations, the loneliness due to the individual's failure to reach some common understanding with the world. This is the bitterest loneliness of all, the loneliness which is eating away at the heart of my existence.” [F. Nietzsche, *My Sister and I*. IV:31]

<sup>29</sup>J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*. II:142-146, [spoken by Belial advising against the open war recommended earlier by Moloch]

this idea in its most terrifying form: existence, as it is, without meaning or aim, but inevitably recurring, with no end in nothingness: eternal return. It is the most extreme form of nihilism: eternal nothingness (nonsense)!<sup>30</sup>

Surrender to despair is, as the initial despair itself, an *invisible* event. Consciously one opposes it and tries to get out of it, one may be terrified and frightened. But as one keeps trying to avoid it, one only sinks deeper into the despair over one's own despairing. The desperate attempts to oppose it are the *actual signs* of the surrender, of the *invisible* defeat, the *No* said silently in the depths.

### 1.1.3. Saying No

15. The circle of despair is the circle of damnation from which there is no exit. With one exception...? As Belial suggested, one may attempt the cure of non-being. As a spiritual being, he cannot commit suicide and non-being can only be a gift from God. For man it is a different matter: death "is the only god who must come whenever we only call him."<sup>31</sup> In the circle of despair, in the middle of nothingness which is the ultimate unfreedom, suicide appears as the last possibility of retaining and proving one's freedom. "Man can kill himself because he has such capacity; and this capacity without the right to its use would be a luxury."<sup>32</sup> The argument is rather strange, suggesting that everything which is possible should also be allowed. But we sense the need to justify suicide by ascribing it the element of freedom in addition to, or perhaps even instead of, the reactive character of ultimate despair. (In Mainländer, the universal fact of the death of finite beings is even called the "will of death", though in humans and living beings in general this metaphysical – yeah, even divine – will of death is covered up by the apparent "will of life".)
16. The negative character of this freedom (if freedom it is) is obvious – it is a door of escape, 'liberation from...'. Over 50% of studied suicide attempts are classified as individuals trying to achieve surcease. The rest are either trying to 'manipulate' the environment (to have revenge on a rejecting lover, to ruin the life of another person, to have the final word in an argument as in the so called "altruistic suicide") or are combinations of both. In every case, self-inflicted death seems to be the last thing one is capable of achieving, is the last possibility of self-chosen act.<sup>33</sup>

In either form, the voluntary choice of death is saying *No*; it is accepting that only emptiness surrounds the horizon of *visibility*; and since *nothingness* is nothing, the only hope of transcending the unbearable situation is to pass into non-being. One might, perhaps, discern an element of heroism in attempting such a free act in the depth of spiritual enslavement, in sacrificing one's life when confronted with a higher truth. But it is lamentable when this higher truth turns out to be nothing and the apparent freedom is only escape.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup>F. Nietzsche, *Notes about Nihilism*. p.77. 'Eternity' of hell is always posited as the infinity of objective time (whether eternal return or just eternally lasting suffering). Infinite time, this bad image of eternity, witnesses to the continuing attachment to visibility. "The fear of future turns into the fear of death, and the fear of death into the fear of hell. It is always fear of the fate in time, of the lack of any end in time, that is, fear of the lack of exit from objectivisation, of infinite objectivisation." [N. Berdyayev, *I and the world of objects*. IV:3]

<sup>31</sup>F. Hebbel, *Werke*. vol.IV/V:4311 [after G. Sowiński, ed., *Around Nihilism*.]

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. vol.IV/V:2292. Perhaps one of the most extreme expressions of this direction of thought is metaphysics of annihilation in P. Mainländer, *Die Philosophie der Erlösung*, according to which the "thrill of annihilation" and "will of death" is the ultimate truth of the thirst for peace, in fact, of any spiritual thirst. In our days, Zapfe's "Uninhabited planet is no tragedy" seems to repeat this aestheticism of annihilation, whose usual and only attempt at self-justification is appeal to nature – "what difference would it make to her were the race of men entirely to be extinguished upon earth, annihilated! she laughs at our pride when we persuade ourselves all would be over and done with were this misfortune to occur! Why, she would simply fail to notice it." This last quotation, perhaps a bit unfortunately, is from D. A. F. de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. Yet another effort, Frenchmen...

<sup>33</sup>Research indicates that most suicide attempts are not preceded by a clear and definite decision but that such people for the most are undecided about living or dying and as if gamble with death leaving it to others to save them. Such cases would nevertheless fall under our description of "self-chosen act" or "voluntary choice made by myself", which mean of course more than reflectively conscious choices of goals and definite course of actions. Psychological differences between a person merely gambling with death and one determined for and efficiently carrying out a suicide do not concern us – each has chosen suicide and each has chosen it *himself*.

<sup>34</sup>Admissibility of suicide is always an expression of absolutisation of the *visibility* beyond which nothing can be ... seen. The dignified suicide of a samurai or a Roman official, as the last way of preserving one's honor, perhaps even of expressing one's respect for the one commanding the suicide, is probably the best example of reducing human existence to a tool of the social system. Suicide is also often defended by reference to the need of preserving one's dignity and self-respect in the face of unbearable suffering. The complexity of the issue eludes any simple judgments but we would, nevertheless, point out that taking one's life amounts to ingratitude for this

But there is also another way of saying No. Having surrendered to despair, one now accepts it. I am in prison, and there is no way out. "Nay, cursed be thou; since against his thy will//Chose freely what it now so justly rues./Me miserable! Which way shall I fly//Infinite wrath and infinite despair?//Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;"<sup>35</sup> Since I am imprisoned, so I will stay imprisoned – there is nothing I can do about *that*. Eventually, staying spiritually imprisoned amounts to willing this imprisonment. "If it should now happen that God in heaven and all the angels were to offer to help him to be rid of this torment – no, he does not want that, now it is too late."<sup>36</sup> There is an element of sick will in staying imprisoned, even if this will seems to be not *mine*, but somewhat imposed on *me* from above. This willing is no longer despairing over one's despair, nor is it any longer aesthetising this despair. It is now "despairing of forgiveness, when someone because of the extent of his sins completely gives up hope in God's goodness."<sup>37</sup> It is now accepting one's despair, trying to turn it into something good. Just like voluntary passing into nothingness, suicide, so also this acceptance seems to be self-chosen, even if not self-willed. It is the despair of defiance, as Kierkegaard says, "the despair of wanting in despair to be oneself,"<sup>38</sup> of insisting on *myself* when *I* should completely give up *myself*, of not realising that *I* am only getting the more imprisoned the more *I* resist to surrender.

This active choice of despair agrees on the impossibility of salvation – it is the final acceptance that there is no exit. And so, "if heaven I can not bend, then hell I will arouse."<sup>39</sup> The only thing one can do now is to turn this evil of damnation, "the torment of perpetual penalty,"<sup>40</sup> into good, pretend that evil is good. "Evil, be thou my good: by thee at least//Divided empire with heaven's king I hold."<sup>41</sup> "I hold" because *I* still act on *my* own initiative, from *my* own choice. Yet, *I* never forget that exit was all *I* wanted, and so this 'free' choice of *mine* is only a renouncement, ultimate resignation. It knows, like Milton's Satan and all his associates know, that it wished and still wishes good, something good, which here means exit. But this knowledge has hardly any *visible signs* and remains hidden beyond the *horizon of actuality*. The active choice of No amounts to denying this knowledge. "Woe to you that call evil good and good evil."<sup>42</sup>

Having lost paradise, having "lost the eternal", and now also the hope of regaining it, Mammon advises to do only what can be done by one's own powers. Indeed "great things of small,//Useful or hurtful, prosperous of adverse,/We can create, and in what place so e'er//Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain//Through labour and endurance."<sup>43</sup> In another context, this might sound almost convincing, but here Satan draws the eventual consequence of this whole *invisible* development – to turn in revenge against the *visible* world, against God's last creation, "some new race called Man, about this time//To be created like to us [...] Thither let us bend all our thoughts, to learn [...] what their power//And where their weakness; how attempted best//By force or subtlety; though heaven be shut,/And heaven's high arbitrator sit secure//In his own strength, this place may lie exposed,//The utmost border of his kingdom, left//To their defense who hold it;"<sup>44</sup> The *invisible* defeat, the active No, results in *visible* consequences which permeate the whole existence, for No removes the *invisible* rest from all *actuality*.

It belongs to the nature of damnation that it universalises itself. Just like one can not be happy in the evil world, one can not be damned in the middle of saints and saved. "To the unhappy, it is a comfort to have had companions in misfortune."<sup>45</sup> And when companions are hard to find, one starts producing them by demonstrating the universality of misfortune. "[T]he

---

ultimate gift. ("It's *my life* and I can do with it what *I* want!" *I* certainly can. But if you hear a drug addict pronouncing such an opinion you do not think he is right. You think he is terribly wrong.) Retaining *visible signs* of (self-)respect by neglecting *spiritual thankfulness* is no less dubious deal just because it is common.

<sup>35</sup>J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*. IV:71-73

<sup>36</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*. I:C.B.b.β;p.103

<sup>37</sup>P. Abelard, *Ethics*. §177

<sup>38</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*. I:C.B.b.β

<sup>39</sup>Virgil, *The Aeneid*. VII:312 [modified translation]

<sup>40</sup>P. Abelard, *Ethics*. §168

<sup>41</sup>J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*. IV:110-111

<sup>42</sup>Is. V:20

<sup>43</sup>J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*. II:258-262

<sup>44</sup>Ibid. II: 348-362. (Blake's scheme of thirst which, when suppressed, turns into greed and envy owes much to Milton.)

<sup>45</sup>C. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*. V:42. (The Latin version – *Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris* – was quoted by many authors, but its origin remains unknown.)

more I see//Pleasures about me, so much more I feel//Torment within me,”<sup>46</sup> says Satan who can nothing else but try “all pleasure to destroy,//Save what is in destroying; other joy To me is lost.”<sup>47</sup> “Rebelling against all existence, it thinks it has acquired evidence against existence, against its goodness. The despainer thinks that he himself is this evidence.”<sup>48</sup> The damned, the active *No*, comes thus out of its closed room without, however, ever leaving it; it comes out as the visible activity trying to embrace everything but driven by the substantialised lack, its emptiness. Damnation finds its expression in every single thing and situation, it permeates all actuality, even when it itself remains non-actualised. It is, after all, the very impossibility of actualisation for it has removed everything which possibly might be actualised; equating the ultimate invisibility with emptiness, it has cut away the source of actualising meanings and, eventually, turns even actuality into nothingness. Only absolute emptiness can be absolutely insatiable. Insatiability, the impossibility of satisfaction, is a substantialisation of *thirst*: like Thyestes devouring his own body, like Tantalus ever hungry and never able to reach the water and fruit brushing his lips. Insatiability of damnation is to spread its despair over all and everything, in search for a community beyond its alienation. “Man communicates by means of despair, when he no longer has any other community.”<sup>49</sup>

It is also eternal, for one can not possibly get out from the place where there is no visible exit. The lack of exit means that “no end is limited to damned souls”<sup>50</sup>, means the eternity of damnation. (‘Bad eternity’, of course, infinite temporal duration, for the damned remains thoroughly within time.) The only relief one can then find consists in the confirmation that “damnation is the truth”, that “so is the world”, that “hope is an illusion”. Extreme pain soothes lesser pain; common degeneration in the world around seems to attenuate my own degeneration; nothing seems to allay more the meaninglessness of the private suffering and despair, than the realisation that this is actually the universal truth of life. It would be futile to ask what comes first – suffering or the perception of its common (if not universal) nature. Suffering is indistinguishable from its experience, while “universal”, “common”, etc. are here only actualised expressions of the ‘objective’ character of evil, of the fact that it overcomes *me*, is ‘greater than me’. At this last circle of despair, the suppressed *thirst* solidifies, one could say, substantialises the ultimate emptiness as a universal truth. But since this *actual* truth is not any truth, one is bound to keep searching for its confirmations.

\* \* \*

20. What we have called “despair” Kierkegaard would classify as only its higher stages, perhaps, as “the despair which is conscious of being despair”. Already our *thirst* would be classified by him as lower levels of despair. Indeed, the stages of the gradual intensification of *thirst* to despair referred to above correspond closely to the intensification of despair described by Kierkegaard in *The sickness unto death*, I.C.B.*Despair viewed under the aspect of consciousness*. So, what’s the difference? Is there any?

We certainly do not want to be so dramatic, for life is not. There may be humility in *thirst* which would be hard to find in despair. But we also sense a significant difference. What we said in §3 about the commonality of *thirst*, might have been expressed by Kierkegaard, for instance, as follows: “An older woman who has supposedly left all illusion behind is often found to be fantastically illuded, as much as a young girl, of how happy she was then, how beautiful, etc. This *fuiimus* [we have been], which we so often hear from older people, is just as great an illusion as the younger people’s illusions of the future; they lie or invent, both of them.”<sup>51</sup> All that is probably true, in a sense, but it is not right. If people “invent or lie” and they do so throughout the whole history of mankind, then the problem lies rather in the diagnosis than in the diagnosed.

<sup>46</sup>J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*. IX:119-121

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. IX:477-479

<sup>48</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*. I:C.B.b.β

<sup>49</sup>E. Durkheim, *The Suicide*. III:6. Durkheim speaks here only about the tendency to, what he calls, “egoistic suicide”, arising from the dissolution of social structures and increased individualisation or, as we might perhaps say, alienation. “The individual’s appetite for life diminishes because the connections relating it to the society are weakened.” We would not identify our alienation with Durkheim’s ‘individualisation’, just like we would never identify *absolute* with ‘society’. But putting absolutisation of the social aspect aside, we can easily recognise the accuracy and relevance of Durkheim’s observations.

<sup>50</sup>C. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*. XIX:171. (“limited” meaning appointed, fixed definitely.)

<sup>51</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*. I:C.B.b.α.1

*Thirst*, as we shall see, is not something which, like Kierkegaard's despair, one just has to dissolve in active consciousness. It certainly is not, as is despair, a sin which cannot avoid deepening alienation. And this is the crucial difference – Kierkegaard insists on a kind of consciousness: “what characterises despair is just this – that it is ignorant of being despair”<sup>52</sup>. Yet, “the more consciousness, the more intense despair”<sup>53</sup>, and so it seems we have a slight problem with the relation between consciousness and spirituality. The two seem often simply identified, “inwards, at an even higher level of consciousness”<sup>54</sup>, as if inwards was impossible without *actual* consciousness.

Perhaps, it is only a minor technicality in need of a proper interpretation, but it seems to harbour the fundamental conflict of Kierkegaard's, of which the tension between the intensity of actual consciousness and the passivity of the spiritless (bourgeois) is only an epitome. “But despair is exactly man's unconsciousness of being characterised as spirit.[...] Most people live without being properly conscious of being characterised as spirit – and to this one can trace all the so-called security, contentment with life, etc., which is exactly despair.”<sup>55</sup> Such desperate classifications (smelling if not gnosis, then Lutheran pietism and sense of sinfulness) we are unable to share. Being ‘properly conscious’ of anything is no goal of life, neither is seeing desperate involvement in every world involvement, especially in the secure and content one. Sure, one can attempt a bit sharper interpretation, giving more plausibility to this opposition. But we think it is unnecessary because what counts in Kierkegaard's, as in any other philosophy, is the fundamental mood, the fundamental truth which it elaborates in all possible forms. The mood of Kierkegaard is that of a dramatic tension, yeah, of a prophecy arising from the opposition to the neglect and disrespect shown by the world, by “the small market town”, to the higher, spiritual things. There may certainly be a tension between the two elements, but spiritualising consciousness makes it into an unbearable contradiction. The result seems quite a bit unhealthy, especially, if we take into account that “[h]ealth is in general to be able to resolve contradictions.”<sup>56</sup> Kierkegaard is the unresolved contradiction between the two poles: an individual, free spiritual existence and the world, sunk in impersonal spiritlessness. If you like, it is the contradiction between the self, founded in the relation to God, and God himself, whom the self can not reach through mere consciousness. Whichever form, we do not want to end in the same point. If the world is an enjoyable place of comfort and (why not? aesthetic) content, then the goal is not to leave it. And if the world is impersonal, inauthentic, despairing, then the goal is not to leave it, either. One lives in *this world*, and the fact that its platitudes and spiritlessness can sometimes feel discouraging does not mean that spirit lives somewhere else. If it lives anywhere, it is only in the midst of *this world*, not perhaps *in its dissociated* things and spiritless activities, but between them. Such a depersonalised world, such deindividualised people as existentialists, following Kierkegaard, used to describe are “inventions or lies”, for people appear so only when viewed through the requirements of plain *visibility* and transparency. The opposition of a reflected personality to the stupefying images of mass-media or narrow-minded images of a market-town does not extend to the contradiction between spirit and spiritlessness, nor that between faith and sin. The world one lives in is the world as one is able to see it. Accusations against it turn out, eventually, to be self-accusations.

Consciousness of despair can certainly intensify the despair, but despair can also reach quite deep levels without active consciousness. We have emphasized that deepening of despair is, at the bottom, an *invisible* process, and realising it consciously is only an additional possibility – certainly, tremendously complicating, but not necessary. It is unnecessary because one always somewhat, in the depth of *irreflective self-awareness*, knows one's *spiritual* condition. This knowledge, however, is not that of *actual* consciousness which fully realises what's going on, whence it comes and whereto it goes. It is this very inability of *actually* seeing whereto the experienced despair is going which, on the one hand, deepens the despair and, on the other hand, suggests that the possibility of healing lies elsewhere and not in the autonomy of consciousness. We will comment this issue in more detail in 3.1.

---

<sup>52</sup>Ibid. I:C.B.a

<sup>53</sup>Ibid. I:C.B.a

<sup>54</sup>Ibid. II:B

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. I:B

<sup>56</sup>Ibid. I:C.A.b. $\beta$

## 2 Spiritual choice of No

21. Despair is a form of *alienation*, of turning *nothingness* into nothing or, what amounts to the same, being cut off from the *origin*. It is the ‘ontological’ separation carried to the ‘epistemic’ extreme of *dissociation*. In the ‘epistemic’ categories of *actuality*, there is indeed no difference between the two... But this ‘epistemic’ mistake affects the whole ‘ontology’ – for in the sphere of *spirit* there is no distinction between being and knowing. The form of *confrontation* is the *confrontation* itself, and what and how it is lived determines the ‘ontological’ character of what it encounters. The ultimate emptiness, apparently so abstract and irrelevant for *here-and-now*, once it finds the site in the depth of one’s being will only spread further and further down, putting gradually more and more regions under its spell. Whether it experiences itself as evil, or only finds evil in its experience, it is a seed from which more evil arises. For even if evil is at the bottom lack and negativity, it is lack which propagates and grows, it is negativity which universalises itself.

*Alienation* is the substantialisation of *thirst* which, unable to maintain the positive – even if impossible, *objectless* and hence unimaginable – character of its intention, absolutises the negative character of the experience as absence, as a mere lack. Despair may for quite a long time remain in a suspension as to its character – as suffering, and hence an evil experience which, however, need not be an experience *of* evil. As long as it remains so suspended, it is suffering but it does not become evil. Renouncing the impossible possibility of exit, it ceases to suffer. But it ceases to suffer only because it ceases to feel and know, only because it has now turned its suffering into impossibility of liberation, into the ultimate *alienation*, that is, evil. Despair need not be evil though, in the moment it begins to re-cognise evil behind its suffering, it is on the way to become it itself. Every evil expresses this *alienation* which, unable to stand the suffering, begins to experience it as a substantial entity and objectifies it as ‘evil’ (cause, person, accident, life, world). Thus, distancing itself from it, it becomes also distanced from an *aspect* of its life and, at the bottom of it, from its source. Evil, we might say, is suffering which became substantialised in an attempt to escape it.

22. Unquenched *thirst* brings pain and pain, just like suffering, is a great danger; it can infect the *soul*.<sup>57</sup> “A hit with a hammer into the head can damage the soul.” The one who is suffering asks all the questions of Job’s and, eventually and inevitably, asks “Why?”. Left without answer, one grants *oneself* the right to accuse the surroundings, other people, the world – for undeserved suffering, for neglect, then for injustice, for immorality and, finally, for evil. “I did not deserve this! It is evil!” And who are you to know what you deserve and what you do not? Whatever the accusations, at their basis lies *No* which having all the reasons (bad rather than good, but seemingly sufficient) to blame and accuse, becomes hate. Hatred is not an irrational, unjustified feeling without reasons. As anger, according Seneca, it hardly ever occurs without reasons and, typically, it has plenty of reasons for its own justification, it “does necessarily presuppose an injury, either done, or conceived, or feared.”<sup>58</sup> It only “proceeds to the resolution of a revenge, the mind assenting to it.”<sup>59</sup> But hatred, again like anger, “passes the bounds of reason, and carries it away with it” or, as we would say, it is an expression (one of the strongest ones) of *alienation*, of the negative separation from the hated *object*, person, the other, the alien, which caused my pain. Then, when the “why?” does not find any satisfying answer, and one is unable to stop dwelling on one’s pain, the granted hatred may embrace the whole world.<sup>60</sup>

Suffering which does not disappear grows. Time heals only wounds which have ceased to cause pain. But even a negligible pain, if it lasts, turns out to be a constant element of *my life*, which may affect deeper and deeper levels of *my soul*. Initially it may affect only *my actual* situation which *I* am able to face with all the vitality of *my actual* strength. *I* may gather my strength and say “It hurts but I can stand it”. And sometimes it works. But if it does not... *I* can not distinguish

<sup>57</sup>“Pain” can be here taken to refer generally to all kinds of what is often called “natural evil” – physical pain, sickness, natural catastrophes, etc. Hardly any of the following formulations would require change if we interpreted it this way. We do not draw rigid distinctions here, but “suffering” is meant in the more fundamental sense, as the personal – whether physical, emotional, moral or spiritual, whether only felt or also lived and deeply experienced – pain, without any consideration of its causes.

<sup>58</sup>L. A. Seneca, *By Way of Abstract*. [after A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*.]

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Self-pity is, in fact, also an expression of *alienation*. Pitying itself, it dwells in *attachment* which is underlined by the image of ‘the evil world’, the ‘evil’ which is out there, against which it is impotent.

clearly *my soul* from *my world*, nor *my world* from *this world*. A suffering *soul* sees only suffering which, eventually, can spread over the whole world. When so it encounters something else, it is a mere appearance, an accident, a transitory insignificance.

We do not have to list examples of how pain experienced by children may deform their personality. 23. But we should keep in mind that such a pain is not necessarily a child abuse, a sadistic attitude of the father, or any other plain form of violence. A molestation, minor annoyances, tokens of indifference or undeserved blame, when confronting a sensitive *soul* may be experienced as deeply hurting and painful. A mere negligence, or else, high demands and expectations, when not compensated by the overall atmosphere of love, underlying care and understanding may constitute painful experiences. A mere presence of a child at a scene of a humiliation, revile, deception, ravishing, even of a simple quarrel between adults may cause enough pain.<sup>61</sup>

Evil is primarily a reaction – a reaction which seems justified, but which is neither controlled nor 24. even realised. The first form of love – because it is also the form of *thirst* – is the need to be loved. Evil is born between men from the lack of love but also, and primarily, from pain caused often without any intention, as if by accident. Yet pain, even suffering, need not be evil. It becomes so when one rises a wall of defense against the ‘evil world’, against all the forces which bring suffering, when suffering begins to alienate.<sup>62</sup>

There are innumerable ways of causing pain and of suffering, and it would be futile to attempt their classification. It would be futile first of all because, obvious as some of such ways might be, we do not know them all and we can not know them – it is not a matter for any general classification, but for the concrete attention paid to the *actual* situations. There are no *objective, visible* criteria not only for what, in more subtle cases, may constitute a painful experience, but, above all, not even for what consequences inflicted pain may have. An unsatisfied need of a crying baby may turn out just an insignificant accident, but also a first suggestion of a lack, on which later disappointments will grow; an aggressive sentence stated carelessly to the spouse, may happen to be ignored by a child accidentally present in the same room, or else it may hit the most sensitive core of its understanding; a misunderstood joke may become a mortal offense.

There may be far from such details to evil, but like all *actual* experiences, they too penetrate gradually the soul’s *virtual* depths. Evil emerges at first as a mere consent to evil, perhaps only ignorance of it, and it emerges from such ‘misunderstandings’ – it is born between men, but it is born *into* them.

## 2.1 Malum privativum

Eftiness of eventual *alienation* is not anything one chooses for its own sake. At first, it is perhaps 25. only an irrelevant annoyance, a slight threat, then it becomes terrifying, and eventually becomes a horror, *horror vacui*. Nothingness is not anything one chooses at all, for it lies far above the sphere of possible *actual* choices. To begin with, “Nothingness is a thirst for Something”, as Jacob Böhme

<sup>61</sup>The director Robert Wilson, in cooperation with an anthropologist, conducted a film analysis of a situation mother-child: the child is crying, the mother lifts it. Split into 300 frames sequence displayed unexpectedly that, in the first phase, the mother reacts aggressively and that the child responds with a complex of movements and sounds expressing fear; only then the actions of the mother become caring and protective. The woman did not want to believe that. Wilson’s conclusion: there are subconscious «frequencies of contact» below the globalising level of words, exchange of signals so minute that they can be brought to the surface only by an analysis in slow motion. [after K. Wolicki, *Convictions of the theatre of counterculture (2)*.]

<sup>62</sup>Although it is common to consider suffering an evil, we will not identify them without further ado. The Hebrew language of Old Testament, for instance, does not even possess an equivalent of “suffering”. The primitive root “ra’ā” means to be bad, displeasing or *sad*, and the noun “ro’ā” denotes evil or wickedness but is also used for sadness or sorrow (e.g., in Ecc.VII:3, “Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the *sadness* of the countenance the heart is made better.”) There are multiple variations which, however, denote suffering only in special contexts and in derivative sense. E.g., “tsame’” = to (suffer) thirst; “ra’eb” = to suffer famish; the passive form (*niphal*) “arek” of the verb “arak” = to prolong, be long, means being patient and also to suffer exposure to evil, and similar association obtains with words like “yanach”, “nathan” which, referring primarily to resting, putting down, leaving or letting go, are also used in passive forms for being inflicted. But there is no single word capturing the distinction between suffering and evil and the Greek word for suffering, “pascho”, occurs only infrequently in Septuagint. One could elaborate various speculations on the ways the lack of this distinction influenced the concept and understanding of evil and justice. We will, however, keep the distinction for the main reason suggested above and earlier at the end of §21: suffering is the *experienced* quality, one would be tempted to say, an essential aspect of human life, while evil is a consequence or only a conclusion drawn from suffering, as possible as unnecessary.

says. Not knowing what this ‘Something’ might be, it is a confused circling, a search, a desperate – because incessant and indelible – search for ‘Something’. The *soul*, even the infected *soul*, does not want anything evil. But missing ‘Something’, missing ‘Something’ to believe in and to rest on, it may get involved in evil as well as in good. This early stage of nihilism – not knowing what to believe<sup>63</sup> – may still have all the signs of innocence and undeserved suffering. But it may also, and more typically it does, appear in a variety of forms determined by the still functioning *idol* (all *idols* are also forms of *alienation*): as egocentrism, as a self-satisfied activity (which negates all that does not serve its goal), as amiable aesthetism of Dorian Grey (whose soul rots in the closed room), as an American-dream hero (who only occasionally must visit his psychoanalyst), as an obedient functioning of a scrupulous clerk (accidentally, working in a concentration camp).

Anonymous and impersonal evil grows on the passivity of such a nihilism which, at first, still tries only to find some new *idols*. XX-th century has taught us the lesson of the most impersonal workings of evil; as Hannah Arendt described, it is the mere failure to reflect which accounts for the impersonal banality of evil. Satan does not any longer visit individuals the way Mephistopheles visited Faust; he remains invisible and unheard, appears only now and then as a hardly identifiable, even if remarkable, person. He acts, as Woland in Bulhakow’s *Master and Margarita*, kind of *incognito*, impersonally, through other executioners, and only the final results show to the public that devil must have been involved. He is no longer a psychologist but a sociologist, perhaps, a politician.<sup>64</sup>

26. Evil of this lowest, most impersonal, but for this reason also the most global kind, is not anything *I* choose but something *I* participate in, it is ‘greater than me’. It is unintentional, unwilling, perhaps even well meant – a “force which would do good ever yet forever works evil”. This fact, that it happens as if in spite of me, through me but not by me, illustrates the aspect of *alienation* almost at the psychological level. Persons affected by Woland become like machines: not because they suffer from some form of a depersonalisation disorder, not because they merely *feel* detached, not because they cease to think and lose the ability to choose, but because the objective world has taken away their possibilities to act and choose – they get involved into situations created completely behind their back, which they can only continue acting without a slightest possibility of exercising any influence on further development.

It is an old mantra that “passivity increases chances for (becoming) evil” that, in the words of Paul Wladimir, “omission is nothing else but an alliance with evil” and “truth which is not defended will be defeated”. Are these trivialities? Of course – if we only assume that ‘the world is evil’. The evil of many socio-political systems of the XX-th century left the astonishment: “How can it be possible?” Humans seem to do all that, but it is inhuman; nobody wants that, and yet it happens: “all I know is that there is suffering and that there is none guilty.”<sup>65</sup> Having first declared human beings innocent for the evils for which only defective social organisation carries responsibility, it takes now nothing less than brightness and precision of the French-most

---

<sup>63</sup> And barely suspecting that nothing can be believed. It was called “passive nihilism” in L. Landgrebe, *Zur Überwindung des europäischen Nihilismus*, and in W. Kraus, *Nihilismus heute oder Die Geduld der Weltgeschichte*.

<sup>64</sup> Another powerful image in modern literature was drawn in reference to the society suffering equally and from the analogous disease as the communist Moscow afflicted by Woland. Visiting Leverkühn in T. Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, XXV, devil enters as a petty individual of a very dubious appearance and social status, but even this personal, or rather impersonal trait changes several times during the conversation, suggesting the presence, as effectual as imperceptible, throughout all the layers of the society and culture. In 1995 French theologian summarises: “Satan’s greatest success in modern times is replacement of the direct activity – arising the fear of the devil – by an organic, imperceptible, and hence tranquilising activity, which penetrates the social texture without noise, devoid of the signature of the prince of this world, run by his agents occupying appropriate, strategic positions.” [R. Laurentina, *Satan, a myth or reality?*. p.118] In spite of the catholic insistence on the personal and concrete being of the devil, his workings appear quite impersonal: “We know well that this dark, destructive and disquieting being really exists and acts, preparing against us sophisticated traps meant to destroy the moral balance of humans.” [Paul VI, 1972, in *Report on the State of Faith*] But this depersonalisation of devil, his dissolution in impersonal forces, is at least as old as the modern nihilism. Devil appearing to Ivan Karamazov is a completely average person, an anonymous member of middle or lower class. In the 1830-ties, Aloysius Bertrand can see devil penetrating every corner of the social system: “He argues in the Parliament, leads a defense in the Court, plays on the Stock Market.”[after G. Minois, *The Devil*.VI:2] Depersonalisation was then but another side of the romantic acknowledgment and justification of devil (Clavinhac, Byron, George Sand), followed by the apparent rendering him harmless in the truly naive (even if powerful) socio-positivistic spirit of Hugo’s *La fin de Satan* or Balzac’s *Melmoth réconcilié*. His powerful return in the beginning of the XX-th century tells probably something about the price of such optimism.

<sup>65</sup> F. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan to Alosa in II:V.Pro et contra:4.Rebellion [The Grand Inquisitor]

intellectualism of a sociological provenience to draw the conclusion that ‘subject must be dead’. Helpless and meaningless as only abstract concepts can be, once formulated it may however count on a wide popularity – human ‘subject’ could not possibly effect cruelty, murder and torture on such a broad scale. “It was not me! I did not want it, and hence I did not do it! Nobody wanted it, hence nobody did it!” Unfortunately, all that happened, and so this petty human ‘subject’ is apparently so insignificant that it must be declared non-existent.

We know well enough that even if *subject* has never been more than a dead abstraction, so human person is as alive as it always has been and that *I* am as responsible for my acts as *I* always have been. The removal of human subject amounts, willy nilly, to postulating an analogous center of subjectivity at the level of society (whatever that might mean). We can thus sense here the reappearing ambiguity of ‘subjectivity’ vs. ‘objectivity’, *myself* vs ‘us’, from II:1.4.4.vii (in particular, §§136.ff, p. 174). But no matter how much agency we manage to ascribe to the impersonal forces of cultural formations and socio-political systems, transferring one’s responsibility to them only deepens *alienation*.

The character of evil can be very impersonal and involvement into it can take the form of participation which happens beyond, and even in spite of, whatever ‘subjective’ choices and intentions *I* might have. But it still needs some necessary conditions which here happen to be the participating individuals. *I* participate in evil which is ‘greater than me’; *I* do not have control over its full strength and effects, *I* contribute only *my* small part to the totality which happens to be beyond every single among the involved individuals. Nobody controls it! And yet it happens... Perhaps, we should revive the notion of collective responsibility (as it was done after both World Wars). 27.

In its passive, privative form, evil can appear everywhere, but it will grow only in certain conditions of axiological passivity. Although it never lives fully in any individual, it is always among us, if not *actually* then only *virtually*, germinating. But *virtuality* is already fully real, and when it starts blooming, it may bring forth fruits which are surprisingly and incomparably more sour than the seeds from which they have grown. The shock of the XX-th century is not madmen like Stalin, Mao or Pol Pot, but the legions of common people who carry out the most inhuman operations – the more inhuman, the higher are the *idols* who bless their actions. The terrifying inhumanity of the genocide on the native Americans is not embodied by the people like Ltn. Colonel George Custer, U.S. Cavalry soldiers from Wounded Knee Creek, from Bloody Island or other places of Indian massacres. On the contrary, it emerges through the apparently positive developments (exchange of goods, expansion of the mission) and, eventually, even underneath the genuine and honest attempts to repair the damages, best wishes of people like John Collier (Roosevelt’s chief of the Bureau of Indian Affairs implementing “New Deal” for Indians) – the inhumanity of the genocide whose mere scale excludes any personal guilt, but which continues *in spite of* the increasingly good intentions or bad conscience of the guilty ones.

Even if we subtract, in all such cases, the expected amounts of private gain, of personal will to power and money, of resentment and revenge, we are still left with legions of ... ‘normal people’ participating in global evil. (Unfortunately, we are dealing with ‘normal people’ even if we do not subtract anything.) They are legions because to participate in this evil is so easy, almost natural: just obey the orders, or do your job, or sometimes, do not pay too much attention. Elaborating on this theme of the banality of evil, Oksenberg Rorty observes that corruption “can begin with the perception of injury or threat; or with a vision of what seems a tantalising good. A society can become so pervasively corrupt that its members can typically fail to recognise their viciousness.”<sup>66</sup>

It seems that we thus encounter ... the original sin, or at least its possible variant. We could certainly refer to the above paragraphs to counter the unreserved claims of Pelagian flavour that human can freely choose goodness which is in his power and that sin (as a cause or result – or both – of evil) is the matter of every individual. It is in one’s power to *actually* decide, or rather only admit, that one wants something which is good, that one “thirsts for Something”, but one’s power ends about there. “They want good but effect evil, for they know not what they do.” As desire for good is fully compatible with it, this original sin is not an “innate sinful depravity of the heart”, it is not a moral category appealing to personal consciousness and making it *visible* “that the soul of man, as it is by nature, is in a corrupt, fallen and ruined state,”<sup>67</sup> that his “whole

28.

<sup>66</sup>A. O. Rorty, *How to harden your heart....*

<sup>67</sup>J. Edwards, *Original Sin*. I:1.1; I:1.3

nature is a seed of sin; hence it can be only hateful and abhorrent to God.”<sup>68</sup> We certainly do not want to get all too puritan, revivalist, Calvinist or Lutheran. In a strange way, it is the sin which anchors individual in the community, the sin which is as if committed only by the community, and therefore one in which everybody participates.<sup>69</sup> It is impersonal evil which spreads among individuals affected by even the slightest degree of despair or nihilism – it grows and effects results which might not have been intended by anybody, for which no particular person *actually* carries full responsibility. Yet, everybody is responsible for it, so we might say that original sin is one which no individual commits, but for which every individual is responsible.

Just like the lowest level of despair is characterised by the lack of any knowledge thereof, so the one (that is, everybody) affected by the original sin hardly ever realises it, never meets its efficacy in the *actuality* of one’s consciousness, and consequently hardly ever confronts any *actual* choice related to it. One may still live the ethos of one’s parents, family, nation, one may still be apparently active in all possible ways, yet one is already exposed to the *unclarity* of values and concrete decisions. One is not evil – on the contrary! Many of Hitler’s willing (and unwilling) executioners were decent citizens; good family fathers were tools of the most inhuman evil.<sup>70</sup>

*Malum privativum* spreads by not being recognised or not being opposed actively enough. It spreads as we sit and as we walk – “Never forget://we walk on hell,//gazing at flowers.”<sup>71</sup> Studying mere psychology and analysing mere individuals will hardly ever give its concept except, perhaps, as a demonic force overcoming individuals with irresistible power and taking possession of their souls. For it is anonymous, it only sneaks between humans through their ‘misunderstandings’ – on the local, personal, or else on the social scale. These two, apparently opposite poles (of personal and social interactions), share the same element of unintentional, non-voluntary, we could almost say, natural emergence of evil. Its germs may appear without anybody noticing. We do not know all the conditions under which *thirst* becomes lack. In the traditional language, the ‘natural’ predisposition to the emergence of evil, the appearance of evil between humans in spite of their natural *thirst* for God, was called “original sin”. Perhaps, it is not a necessary feature of human nature, but it seems to have been always present in human history; it seems to be so common – and so powerful – that *dissociating* the two might be a futile exercise of intellectual optimism.

## 2.2 Malum negativum

29. Just like the transition from despair to the despair over despairing may be hard to observe, so the transition from not knowing what to believe to not believing anything may be imperceptible. This most negative stage of nihilism marks also a more personal level, for the experience of the all-embracing emptiness, erasing all *idols*, acts also as a painful individualisation principle. In terms of evil, it is its loneliness, reflected by an internalisation: evil walks alone, it becomes introvert, self-directed; it acquires the character of privacy which is only another expression of the progressing alienation.

It should not be necessary to repeat all the stories and analyse the differences between various forms of meaninglessness and boredom, nausea, insensitive irritability, strangeness, remoteness and foreignness, etc. They have been thoroughly enough studied and described by writers from Hölderlin and Hebbel, through the Russians like Turgieniev, Gogol, Dostoevsky, to Sartre, Camus,

<sup>68</sup>J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. [after A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*. p.121]

<sup>69</sup>As this sin, at least to some extent, gathers (while evil divides) and as it is not something intended and actually willed (while “[t]here can be no sin that is not voluntary” [St. Augustine, *On True Religion*. XIV:27]), the followers of St. Thomas would call it a sin only in an analogous sense, only a shadow of sin properly so-called. Participation in sin implies responsibility for it, and this is the whole and only sense of its ‘voluntary character’ in the present context – for one is responsible for everything one participates in, even though no *actual* willing is involved and no *actual* responsibility can be imputed.

In the older and more traditional societies, the same idea seems to have been present as the fear of pollution with correlative craving for ritual purification. Pollution results from ‘unclean’ actions but can also become infectious or hereditary. (Thus, for instance, there seems to be no signs of such infectious or hereditary transmission of *miasma* in Homer, but in the Archaic Age it became both and was accepted as such to the Classical Age. Plato would still debar from religious or civic activities those who had voluntary contact with even slightly polluted person, until they have been purified (*Laws*, 881DE).) Such involuntary, uncontrollable and almost mechanic workings of pollution suggest equally mechanic purification which develops from simple forms performed by laymen in Homer to advanced rituals of *catharsis* in the Archaic Age.

<sup>70</sup>Dostoevsky notes in his Notebook: “In fact, we were the nihilists, we in the constant search for a superior idea.”

<sup>71</sup>Japanese haiku poet Issa (1763-1827) [after L. Stryk and T. Ikemoto, eds., *Zen Poetry*. p.108]

Beckett... Personal disintegration of the heroes of this tradition is the evil of alienation reflecting the metaphysical emptiness surrounding them and the world in which they live. As there is hardly any distinction between *me* and *my world*, the emptiness of the latter results in the dissolution of the former. And this is no paradox that emptiness causes dissolution, nor that the indissoluble person disintegrates – for dissolution is exactly the alienation of actuality from the self and it is effected by the emptiness which sneaks in between the two, which dissociates heaven from earth and, eventually, announces nothingness of the former. What can be observed in actual situations is alienation from the world, from the surroundings and other people, but these are only consequences, only visible signs.

The common theme underlying this process in all the above mentioned (and others) variants is the sense of unreality: first the invisible becomes unreal (for only what is visible is real), then the world around *me*, losing all sense and meaning becomes unreal, too, and finally, even *I myself, my whole life* become unreal.<sup>72</sup> This sickness to unreality is but another face of the despair over one's own despairing. It, too, is self-strengthening, for once started it can only spread until it embraces the whole world. And once completed it, too, offers no exit, for having embraced everything, having turned everything into unreality, it has left nothing 'real outside'.

It may be unclear what is being called "evil" here. Evil seems to happen to the affected person 30. who is suffering all these calamities rather than participating in them, not to mention contributing to them. Is such a person evil? Hardly. He seems even less evil than the ones passively accepting it – he only suffers it. Yet this suffering has a malicious element of acceptance, just like the second stage of despair was only despairing over one's own situation. He is in a grasp of evil which is much stronger, deeper and more penetrating than *malum passivum*. The alienation has progressed further, has reached a higher, that is, deeper level.

But he himself does not cause any alienation, he does not spread evil! Or so, at least, one would like to see it, believing that one is responsible only for one's free and voluntary choices. Does he really not spread evil by going around (or, for that matter, closing himself 'inside') and being so deeply affected by it? Evil brought against oneself is in no way better than evil brought against somebody else.<sup>73</sup> OK, perhaps, but *he* did not bring it over himself, it happened to him! He needs help, not accusations! But – everybody may need help and nobody needs accusations. We are not accusing anybody. And we admit that it may be a tantalising thought that one serves evil in the midst of opposing it, in spite of all one's hopes and expectations; that one is responsible for it only because *it* has chosen its site in one's soul; that one is guilty by a strange accident, which accuses one of evil in the middle of the fight one leads against it. Unfortunately, every fight witnesses to the presence of some adversary. And when the adversary is in me...?

Deep suffering, hopelessness, and despair over hopelessness, are ways of being affected by evil and, at the same time, of answering for being so affected. The one suffering is not, of course, evil but he is exposed to a trial in which evil can imperceptibly enter his soul. Prolonged suffering can lead either to externalisation of evil as some devilish power responsible for exposing me to it, or to recognition of my own responsibility – not, perhaps, for any voluntary acts and evils but for my imperfections. Either choice deepens alienation. "When a man truly Perceiveth and considereth himself, who and what he is, and findeth himself utterly vile and wicked, and unworthy of all the comfort and kindness that he hath received from God, or from the creatures, he falleth into such a

---

<sup>72</sup>H. Rauschning, *Masken und Metamorphosen des Nihilismus* describes 3 stages of post-Nietzschean nihilism with the last stage being characterised by the whole reality becoming unreal (albeit, in his case, as a consequence of the fall of the *idol* of collectivism which defines the second stage). Rilke: "I really did build my own house and everything that was in it. But it was an external reality and I did not live and expand with it. [...] it does not give me the feeling of reality, that sense of equal worth, that I so sorely need: to be a real person among real things." [L. Salomé, *You Alone are Real to Me*. Letter from Rome, 1904, p.45] In this close association, if not equipollence, of the sense of unreality and alienation – from oneself as much as from the world and others – "when others feel themselves understood and totally accepted, I feel prematurely torn from some sort of hidden place." [Ibid. Letter from Oberneuland, 1905, p.60] Gombrowicz's works, starting in the 30-ies (Ferdydurke, The Marriage), far from being nihilistic, give nevertheless an excellent description of this aspect of unreality, where nothing is itself any more, where even "the Fear itself is but a Fear caused by the lack of Fear", and where the only "wish of my soul is: that something would Happen." [W. Gombrowicz, *Trans-Atlantic*. p.88/114]

<sup>73</sup>Killing oneself is in no way 'better' than killing another. Not because it is worse, but because there is no sense in such a comparison across different persons. Whatever effects alienation is evil, and whatever is evil is so irrespectively of whom it affects. Degree of evil may be, vaguely, associated with the degree to which it alienates, but then again, irrespectively of the affected person. This may be, perhaps, referred to as the 'objectivity' of evil, though it is in every situation relative to the affected person and the way in which this person is being affected.

deep abasement and despising of himself, that he thinketh himself unworthy that the earth should bear him, and it seemeth to him reasonable that all creatures in heaven and earth should rise up against him and avenge their Creator on him, and should punish and torment him; and that he were unworthy even of that. And it seemeth to him that he shall be eternally lost and damned, and a footstool to all the devils in hell, and that this is right and just and all too little compared to his sins which he so often and in so many ways hath committed against God his Creator.”<sup>74</sup> The legalistic or pietistic bias of such self-depreciation, according to which suffering bears only witness to the responsibility for some guilt, according to which perhaps every suffering calls for responsibility and guilt, is indeed evil consuming one’s soul.

31. Although only half-personal, and hardly chosen (not to mention voluntary choice), this form of being partakes of evil. And to participate in evil is to be affected, even consumed, by it (even if we won’t say that it is to *be* evil). This is a higher, more spiritual level of being a victim, perhaps, a victim of plain violence. Having been exposed to an act of violence does not, by itself, make one evil. But it poses before one a lot of choices which open and strengthen the possibility of saying *No*: the arising will to settle the accounts, perhaps the conviction of right to exercise unmitigated revenge, perhaps to nourish hatred, etc.. Even more may be going on behind the scene, in the *invisible world*. The alienating power of the sickness to unreality, not to mention exposure to suffering, lies in strengthening the tendency to pollute with the appearance of evil not only particular situations and events but the world – ‘the whole world’, the *quality* of ‘my whole life’, of ‘human life as such’ can begin appearing as evil or as originating in evil. And the step from seeing evil around oneself to choosing it is even smaller than that from pitying the fate of *X* to hating *Y* who caused it.

## 2.3 Malum activum

32. As we have learnt from Nietzsche, there is a difference between not believing anything and believing nothing. One struck by *malum negativum* lives the fact that there is nothing, no God, no sense, that questions about meaning are not only unanswerable but ultimately empty... But not finding anything, he may still resist the decision that there is nothing. It is, indeed, possible to balance on the edge of this apparent contradiction, but it is very difficult. In fact, the more intensity in the attempts to retain the balance, the stronger the force dragging one towards the conclusion which only confirms the actual situation – there is nothing ‘outside’, only emptiness, void.

As Dostoevsky observed, if there is no God, then everything is allowed.<sup>75</sup> The lived emptiness breeds nihilism all the way down – nihilism, that is, the lack of any criteria, the total ‘freedom’, ‘freedom from...’ or, what amounts here to the same, meaninglessness (for since every meaning carries with it a ‘threat’ of external authority, total ‘freedom from’ can appear only as arbitrariness.) And the more devastating consequences it has in the lower, eventually even visible sphere, the greater the chance for the conclusion that, actually, there is nothing and that one should draw some consequences of this ‘fact’. It is impossible to exit for there is only emptiness ‘outside’; so *I* must obviously stay here, in the middle of this emptiness, but *I* can, for that matter, act – true, towards things and situations which became immersed in emptiness, which lost all their significance and importance, but which still offer all the *visible* material for *action*.

33. “Naught” means both ‘nothing’ and ‘evil’ (as in “naughty”). Tradition associating evil with negativity utilised also the distinction between mere lack, privation, and negation. The former, *privativum* could be read as negation of something particular, of an individual thing, of this or that, and then *negativum* would correspond to a total emptiness, negation of Being as such. We have changed slightly the sense of *privativum*, but retained *negativum* more or less in this form. In either case, it was difficult to see any positive activity in evil, since it was merely an ontological

<sup>74</sup> *Theologia Germanica*. XI. The exclusive emphasis of this aspect would be a bit one-sided (it is probably one of the most ‘Lutheran’ passages in this work discovered by Luther), but the description applies well to other forms of this stage. Stavrogin, for instance, says in his final letter: “I know that I should kill myself, erase myself from the surface of the earth as a harmful insect.” [F. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*. III:8.Epilogue]

<sup>75</sup> “[I]f you have no God what is the meaning of crime?” [F. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. , II:Bk.VI:Ch.3 [Father Zossima]] “[S]ince there is anyway no God and no immortality, the new man may well become the man-god, even if he is the only one in the whole world, and promoted to his new position, he may lightheartedly overstep all the barriers of the old morality of the old slaveman, if necessary.” [F. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. , IV:Bk.XI:Ch.9 [Ivan’s Nightmare]]

lack, a pure non-being. It was a non-substantial negation, incapable of any action emptiness. “For evil is the absence of the good [...] But only good can be a cause [...]”<sup>76</sup>

Eventually, we will perhaps follow this tradition but we should not, for this reason, forget the active character of evil. Emptiness is not necessarily physical annihilation and destruction, but *alienation*, the spiritual emptiness of heavens, *nothingness* which became void. The *No* which declares this ultimate emptiness expects some *visible* cash in exchange (what one used to call “selling one’s soul.”) Evil has a tendency – not to say, power – to grow and spread. It does not help calling it “negation”, “lack” or “emptiness”, because these may seem empty and inactive only when taken abstractly. But evil acts *in* human soul, consumes and corrodes it. Although this corrosion may be viewed as a gradual negation, in fact it is a deterioration and increasing *alienation*. The fact that the final result is negative emptiness, does not mean that the process which led to it was equally empty and non-existent. Evil becomes *malum activum* when it reaches the *spiritual choice* of *No*, when it declares that there is nothing ‘outside’, and when having thus annihilated the sphere of *invisible*, it turns to what is left – *acting* in the *visible world* to compensate for, or else to revenge, the *invisible* loss above. This evil is not only capable of action, but could be almost defined by it, as opposed to the two kinds we have considered before. “Evil, be thou my good: by thee at least//Divided empire with heaven’s king I hold” – these are words of a resolute (even if defeated and resigned) being determined for action. This is resoluteness of the ultimate resignation. Accepting the defeat and impossibility of reconquering paradise, it turns away from the emptiness and directs its activity to all, and only, *visible world*. *Satan sum et nihil humanum a me alienum puto.*<sup>77</sup> *Malum activum*, the evil of active *No*, apparently leaves the passivity of negation (to which it was merely exposed) and decides to act, to take its damned fate into its own hands, and turn it into whatever it chooses, that is, into whatever it is able to. For “to be weak is miserable” while “To reign is worth ambition, though in hell://Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.”<sup>78</sup>

This decision is not, at least not primarily, any *actual* decision. It is of the same order as the <sup>34.</sup> *spiritual choice*, an *invisible* event which starts plaguing the *soul*. *Actual* decisions, like all the psychology of evil, are only *reflections* of the *invisible* *No* which, in turn, is *thirst* culminated in the resigned defeat.

Now, there is no question about the *psychological* possibility of being motivated and attracted by some evil. Such a possibility may be inexplicable for the psychology identifying the ‘good’ with the ‘desired’, but it certainly obtains. *I* can be attracted to some evil not only because “there is a certain show of beauty in sin”, but also because *I* desire it for its evil’s own sake. Augustine recollects: “The malice of the act was base and I loved it – that is to say I loved my own undoing, I loved the evil in me – not the thing for which I did the evil, simply the evil.”<sup>79</sup> But does it mean that our *activities*, the whole life, does not, after all, go on *sub specie boni*? Discussing detailed ‘goods’ and exemplifying attractive force of detailed ‘evils’ may merit descriptive correctness. But behind every *actually* willed evil there hides a *non-actual motivation*, as one used to say, a disposition of the *soul*. And just like *soul* may consent to something it does not want,<sup>80</sup> so man may live *sub specie boni* and yet choose evil, even evil for evil’s sake. “For he certainly desires to be blessed even by not living so that he may be blessed. And what is a lie if this desire be not? Wherefore it is not without meaning said that all sin is a lie. For no sin is committed save by that desire or will by which we desire that it be well with us, and shrink from it being ill with us. That, therefore, is a lie which we do in order that it may be well with us, but which makes us more miserable than we were.”<sup>81</sup> Preferring and choosing evil for evil’s sake is possible at the level of *actual* will, but it is a result, a *reflection* of both the *original thirst* and its misunderstanding, of the *invisible* *No*. It is a sickness of the *soul* and the whole issue lies here and not in the defections of the *actual* choices, of their *actual* goals or motives – for will’s “defections are not to evil things,

<sup>76</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q49.a1

<sup>77</sup>“I am Satan, and deem nothing human alien to me.” [F. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. IV:Bk.XI:Ch.9 [Ivan’s Nightmare]]

<sup>78</sup>J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*. I:157; 262-3

<sup>79</sup>St. Augustine, *Confessions*. II:4 [More recently, similar point is made for instance in M. Stocker, *Desiring the Bad...*]

<sup>80</sup>“There are also people who entirely regret being drawn into consenting to lust or into an evil will, and are compelled by the flesh’s weakness to want what they don’t *want* to want. Therefore, I really do not see how this consent that we don’t want is going to be called “voluntary” [...]” [P. Abelard, *Ethics*. 33-34]

<sup>81</sup>St. Augustine, *The City of God*. XIV:4

but are themselves evil.”<sup>82</sup> The “people with sick souls crave and love the bad character traits and hate the good way. They are careless about following it, and it is very difficult for them, depending upon the extent of their illness.”<sup>83</sup> The illness, moreover, is very peculiar for the affected person will seldom, if ever, have any intimations of it, and the more serious it becomes, the less capable the person is to admit it.

35. History knows many examples, people like Nero, Gilles de Rais<sup>84</sup>, Billy the Kid, Marquis de Sade, whom we would like to classify as pathological cases, assign them appropriate labels and shut in a cabinet with horrible curiosities. But they provide examples of spiritual deterioration which, irrespectively of their actual causes and context, reveal an inherent possibility of human existence. And every single example of a human being illustrates the potential of being human, the potential which can find its expression also in other humans, of which, at least in principle, every human being is capable.<sup>85</sup> Intelligence of de Sade makes his texts express with particular clarity most points we are making. In particular, he declares his choice of *No* with exceptionally self-conscious determination. We will follow him for a moment, but only in order to arrive again to the point that *actual* wanting of evil is only a reflection of the inability to want anything else.

“[I]t is not the object of libertine intentions which fire us, but the idea of evil, and [...] the greatest pleasure is derived from the most infamous source.”<sup>86</sup> Or, the same fascination with transgression, expressed in a slightly different way: “beauty belongs to the sphere of the simple, the ordinary, whilst ugliness is something extraordinary, and there is no question that every ardent imagination prefers in lubricity the extraordinary to the commonplace.”<sup>87</sup> Such an ‘ardent imagination’ finds its inspiration in the low and the ugly, in their variation and manifold which, negating everything above and ‘outside’ the horizon of their plain visibility, can only attempt to intensify its narrow contents. ‘It is the filthy act that causes the greatest pleasure: and the filthier it be, the more voluptuously fuck is shed. [...] the more pleasure you seek in the depths of crime, the more frightful the crime must be.’<sup>88</sup>

As sadism became a label for something one might even be willing to call a particular “sickness”, one might also be less willing to consider it evil. Such labels serve the general tendency of reliving the conscience and ensuring everybody that it was not his fault. But if evil happens to be nobody’s fault, it only means that *everybody* is guilty. In case of “sick” people, like de Sade, there should be little doubt. Sickness is not necessarily evil nor is it necessarily making one evil – but as every pain and suffering it can do both. (Pain, sickness, deformity, as natural associates of evil are consistently symbolised by all hunchbacks, deformed sorcerers and ugly witches in various fairy tales.) However, if one acts evil, it does not matter much whether it is because of some experienced pain, sickness, unhappy childhood, or whatever. As there are no sufficient reasons, no amount of negative experience ever justifies evil. Usually, it functions only as a better or worse excuse.

Actual evil is evil, whether the person causing it had happy or unhappy childhood, whether he is healthy or sick, whether he suffered much or not. Evil is the impossibility of justification, therefore it always looks for excuses. Let us follow de Sade a little bit more.

36. “Certain souls seem hard because they are capable of strong feelings, and they sometimes go to rather extreme lengths; their apparent unconcern and cruelty are but ways, known only to themselves, of feeling more strongly than others.”<sup>89</sup> Strength and intensity of feelings, feelings which one experiences and not manufactures oneself, work as a sufficient excuse for de Sade, in fact, as the highest good itself. Following such impulses is only to follow the nature. “We are no guiltier in following the primitive impulses that govern us than is the Nile for her floods or the sea for her waves.”<sup>90</sup>

Felt intensity is always concentrated, narrowed to the ultimately *actual, immediate*. One

---

<sup>82</sup>Ibid. XII:8

<sup>83</sup>M. Maimonides, *Laws Concerning Character Traits*. [after A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*. X]

<sup>84</sup>G. Bataille, *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*

<sup>85</sup>“[A]ll physical, psychical, and vital forces and organs that are possessed by one individual are found also in the other individuals. [...] There is no difference between individuals of a species in the due course of Nature; the difference originates in the various dispositions of their substances. [An alternative translation has “matter” instead of “substance”.]” [M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*. III:12]

<sup>86</sup>D. A. F. de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom*. The eight day

<sup>87</sup>Ibid. Introduction

<sup>88</sup>Ibid. The seventh day-The eighth day

<sup>89</sup>D. A. F. de Sade, *Fragments*. Last Will and Testament

<sup>90</sup>D. A. F. de Sade, *Fragments*. Aline and Valcour

searches for moments, moments of sensation which could fill one with the stimulating experience. These, at least, seem to offer something capable to overcome the emptiness, to leave it behind at the negative stage. Stavrogin still complains "Here I liked to live least. But even here I was unable to hate anything. [...] I may desire to make a good act and it causes me pleasure. But just in a moment I desire an evil one and feel equal pleasure. Both this and that feeling is as always too flat, and I never desire strongly."<sup>91</sup> De Sade has his answer: "True felicity lies only in the senses, and virtue gratifies none of them."<sup>92</sup> It is the intensity of a momentaneous sensation which appears as the most gratifying, the most true element of experience. And the highest intensity can be found in pain. "[W]e are much more keenly affected by pain than by pleasure: reverberations which result in us when the sensation of pain is produced in others will essentially be of a more vigorous character, more incisive, will more energetically resound in us [...] hence pain must be preferred, for pain's telling effects cannot deceive, and its vibrations are more powerful."<sup>93</sup> "Pain, be thou my good" is but another version of the motto we have extracted from Milton's Satan.

"My manner of thinking, so you say, cannot be approved. Do you suppose I care? A poor fool indeed is he who adopts a manner of thinking for others! My manner of thinking stems straight from my considered reflections; it holds with my existence, with the way I am made. It is not in my power to alter it; and were it, I'd not do so."<sup>94</sup> Strangely enough, this might almost sound plausible ... but not when spoken by *this* person! It should be easy to discern behind these words the deep loneliness of *alienated* individual. "All creatures are born isolated and have no need of one another."<sup>95</sup>

*Alienation* is a break in continuity – first, continuity between *actuality* and its *origin*, then continuity with others and the world and, finally, continuity of time, of this moment with other moments. Having turned away from the *invisible*, there is only one possibility: to embrace and conquer the *visible*. "What is remote is no longer important, only yesterday; and tomorrow is more than eternity."<sup>96</sup> But without the continuity with the *origin*, *this world* shrinks and begins to disappear, becomes first mere *actuality*, *more actuality*, even *more*, until it reaches the limits

<sup>91</sup>F. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*. III:8.Epilogue

<sup>92</sup>D. A. F. de Sade, *Fragments*. Aline and Valcour

<sup>93</sup>D. A. F. de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. Dialogue the Third. (Masochism might be here considered only a variation on the same theme as sadism. 'Morally', perhaps, more acceptable than the latter, it expresses the same desperate yearning for irrefutable *immediacy* of 'truth', pain or pleasure, the same deterioration of the soul. Masochism and sadism affect often the same person and vary depending on the 'balance of power' with the actual partner.)

<sup>94</sup>D. A. F. de Sade, *Fragments*. A letter to his wife.

<sup>95</sup>D. A. F. de Sade, *Fragments*. Aline and Valcour. Variations on the theme of alienation, of "all seek[ing] their own" [Phil. II:21] are, of course, all too numerous to allow any review. Typically, they have a strongly sociological flavour – the individual being alienated from the rest of the society. Ignoring the fact that even such an alienation is but an individual experience and thus, ultimately, an alienation from the *self*, and looking for reasons and excuses in the (often deplorable) social surroundings, they differ completely from our notion. Accusing the industrial towns for the most shameless immorality in the oppression of proletariat, Engels recognises there the same signs of evil: people "crowded by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, [the] dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate essence, and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme." [F. Engels, *Conditions of the working class in England*. IV.The great towns]. Sociological observations underlie also a more recent version which, however, does not quite manage to hide its personal background. We are "discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but [who] yearn for our lost continuity." [G. Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. p.15] The lost continuity can be regained – so goes at least (some) dialectical saying – by a deification of otherness-as-such; deification which seems particularly tempting for disappointed intellectuals and which can equally well serve as a 'natural' explanation – justification! – of coprophilia, necrophilia and other personal deviations. "As soon as the effort at rational comprehension ends in contradiction, the practice of intellectual scatology [the science of excrement] requires the excretion of unassimilable elements, which is another way of stating vulgarly that a burst of laughter is the only imaginable and definitively terminal result – and not the means – of philosophical speculation. And then one must indicate that a reaction as insignificant as a burst of laughter derives from the extremely vague and distant character of the intellectual domain, and that it suffices to go from a speculation resting on abstract facts to a practice whose mechanism is not different, but which immediately reaches concrete heterogeneity, in order to arrive at ecstatic trances and orgasm. [...] To the extent that man no longer thinks of crushing his comrades under the yoke of morality, he acquires the capacity to link overtly not only his intellect and his virtue but his *raison d'être* to the violence and incongruity of his excretory organs, as well as to his ability to become excited and entranced by heterogenous elements, commonly starting in debauchery." [G. Bataille, *The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade*. §12-13.]

<sup>96</sup>L. Salomé, *You Alone are Real to Me*. Rilke's letter from Oberneuland-bei-Bremen, July 25, 1903, p.44

of *immediacy*, and threatens with disappearance in emptiness. A moment devoid of the element of eternity becomes a desperate expectation of the next moment. Intensity is, we could say, a noetic counterpart of such a noematum ‘moment’. Intensity tries to dissolve in this noematic correlate, and failing – tries again. (Thirst for strong, intense feelings is a form of nihilism, too, even if it affects mostly adolescent girls and disappointed women. It is, however, also an expression of the very common reduction of the values of human being to *subjectivity* – feelings, private choices,...) The intensity searched for is also the impulsivity emanated, and as the moments become more and more intense, they also fall apart, each becomes its own universe of intensity collapsing inward, and giving rise to an impulse arising from nowhere. Acting from an impulse has often been associated not only with unreasonable lack of control but with evil – evil which surprises, is unpredictable, emerges suddenly. The word “impulse” carries the meaning of ‘application of sudden force’ but also, even if only secondarily, of a ‘suggestion coming from an evil spirit’. For “evil is unstable”<sup>97</sup> or, as Kierkegaard says, “the demoniac is the sudden”. Demons wake up not when reason is asleep but when it has nothing higher to strive for, when it loses itself in the insatiability of *more and more – precise*, momentaneous, intense, ecstatic...

38. *Malum activum* is the most personal – in the sense, ‘individualised’ – form of evil. This ‘individualisation’, however, has nothing to do with the uniqueness of individual existence, only with the transgressive and *alienating actuality* of its acts and activities. It ‘individualises’ by losing all individuality, it grants *actual* moments, visible sand corns in exchange for the *invisible* reality and *origin* of its sense. It ‘individualises’ by erasing the person of its carrier – a sinner becomes eventually nothing but a substantialisation of evil, the place where its negativity unfolds its active presence. This ‘individualisation’ through *actual* choices, distractions and intensity, apparently filling and overfilling every moment, is only an *inverted* form of the underlying emptiness and, at the bottom, only a perverted form of the genuine existential possibility.

Consciousness, as before, has little to do with any significant aspects. One hardly ever says reflectively and explicitly “Evil, be thou my good”. At most, one may *actually* repeat this after it has been said in the depth of one’s soul; after long time, when most of the consequences became *visible* and one finds it impossible not to accept them. Here, as elsewhere, the *actual subject*, the *reflective consciousness* becomes affected by the *invisible*. It loses all meaning of its contents, and then also all the contents, except, perhaps, for the most *visible* elements of natural necessities. Eventually, consciousness, too, dissolves in the emptiness which has eroded the whole being. *Malum activum* does not any longer try to escape this unfortunate, undeserved, unjust fate – living this inability it only seeks to avenge itself and through revenge *alienates* itself only more and more.

## 2.4 Impersonally personal

Let us gather these levels of gradual growth of evil in some common points.

39. We said “believing in something”, “believing in nothing”. Such formulations did not concern, at least not necessarily, any *actual*, reflectively pronounced beliefs. As usual, *reflective consciousness* does not matter much – it only registers by *dissociating*, *reflects* something which is there already. Evil is never willed for its own sake; even if extreme suffering perverts one’s soul to the point of accepting evil, it is still only a helpless reaction, or as the case may be, hope that at least *this* will be some good.

It arrives unwillingly, from unregistered and unrecognised meanings of one’s acts and words, from ‘misunderstandings’ which prove hurtful, from depersonalised rigidity of humans turned clerks, from impersonal heights of socio-political system, from God knows where... It is born between men (sometimes between man and ‘natural evils’), but it is born into them. An individual may attempt, and often even succeed, to check his evil predispositions, but he is never guaranteed that evil emptiness won’t ever affect him. On a larger, social scale, emergence of evil is simply unavoidable, and the only thing we can try to do is to moderate its strength and scope. The

---

<sup>97</sup>Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*. IV:23. “We shall be reminded that the Vicious Soul is unstable, swept along from every ill to every other, quickly stirred by appetites, headlong to anger, as hasty to compromises, yielding at once to obscure imaginations, as weak, in fact, as the weakest thing made by man or nature, blown about by every breeze, burned away by every heat.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. I:8.11]

unintentionality of evil, underlying these unpleasant observations, was termed the “original sin”.<sup>98</sup>

The unintentional and impersonal (as one also might say, generational and collective rather than individual) character of the original sin does not in any way abolish human participation in it. ‘Killing the subject’, dispensing with it (in the name of impersonal forces of power, capital, social mechanisms or in whatever name one chooses), does not make any amends, does not improve understanding of evil – it only apparently relieves the participants from the sense of guilt and responsibility.

Evil is an event of human life and without humans there would be no evil. We have ignored all kinds of ‘natural evils’, usually distinguished from ‘moral evil’. We are certainly not justified in ignoring such an important aspect. But it does not appear as any problem, nor even a relevant point, to our considerations. Many things happen due to natural processes, and some of them have more or less devastating consequences for some humans. We would not only distinguish it as ‘natural evil’, but would not call it “evil” at all. For evil calls for a justification (which is impossible), while a storm or an earthquake do not – “catastrophes are innocent.”<sup>99</sup> It is either the infantile idea of some omnipotent Being with good will and *actual* intentions, or else some idea of ultimate objectified meaning, eventual *telos*, which might suggest one to look for any ‘explanation’ of this platitude. Natural disasters, like diseases, call for strength to put up with them when nothing can be done, and for inventiveness in preventing them. Calling them “evil” is like getting offended on the world for not pleasing us.

Evil is maintained only in humans, it requires a human, though this might appear as a mere consequence of its understanding as *alienation* from the *origin*. As this is, in principle, possible for every existence, we could probably suggest that it constitutes the *differentia specifica* of the human species: ‘to be capable of evil’. There is a strong tendency to see, eventually, only innocence in all the cruelty of the living nature; a predator, an animal killer is not evil – how could it be?! – it is a survivor. It is impossible, or in any case naive, to transfer any such observations to the world of humans.

Although we do not place evil in nature but only in humans, it does not mean that it becomes 41. human. It remains impersonal, because human being is only a tool of evil. It invades one, often without much warning, without giving any account. The *subject*, *I myself* am affected by something which has found place *above me*, in *my self*. And because this force which found its site there is adversary – which is experienced as various degrees of *alienation* – it is foreign. Whether an evil social or political system, whether Woland who never argues but only commands, or else Mephistopheles who appears in person to discuss with Faust, the force which is brought forth is not *mine*, does not belong to *me* nor, for that matter, to *my self*. It is impersonal, because its strength does not flow from the *original* site of personality but, on the contrary, prevents *me* from regaining this site. It ‘individualises’ by breaking continuity, by *dissociating* heaven from earth and thus *alienating* and isolating. Loneliness, like foreignness, is an *actual* image of *alienation* which follows evil even in the midst of the thickest crowd. This loneliness is *alienation* from the *origin*, the loss of the personal center, and thus the opposite of the unique individuality of *existence*. Participation in evil, submission to this impersonal force, amounts indeed to ‘selling one’s soul’.

If we were to personify such events, we would ascribe evil the *intention* of becoming *visible* (its surrogate for *concreteness*), which it achieves by invading a human soul and, through it, overcoming its own impersonal abstractness. A person of active *No*, but also a sinner who approaches the deeper layers of emptiness, is a substantialisation of evil; a substantialisation which proceeds gradually, as the emptiness embraces the soul and finds its *visible* expressions, but which never becomes complete, which never reaches the goal. For the goal would be, as it always is, to reach the very center of Being, to achieve the ultimate justification by meeting the *origin* – this, however, is the exact opposite of evil. Evil, although originating in *this world*, begins without being noticed, and then penetrates the soul to its deep, *invisible* roots. However, its ultimate, *invisible* site is not in the center of Being, in the *origin*. For it is exactly *alienation* from the *origin*, *alienation* of *myself* from *self*, which is evil. Thus, “evil always lessens good, yet it never wholly consumes it; and thus, while good ever remains, nothing can be wholly and perfectly bad. Therefore, the

---

<sup>98</sup>‘Original sin’ is not meant to *explain* the appearance of unintended evil (we do not explain anything) – it is only a term of description.

<sup>99</sup>Z. Herbert, *King of the Ants*. Cleomedes

Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 5) that "if the wholly evil could be, it would destroy itself"; because all good being destroyed (which it need be for something to be wholly evil), evil itself would be taken away since its subject is good."<sup>100</sup>

42. The impossibility of reaching the *absolute*, the lack of *concrete founding* in the *origin* is *alienation*.<sup>101</sup> Allow us to call such a continuity of Being, the *concrete founding* in the *origin*, "justification". Then evil as *alienation* is exactly the lack and impossibility of *justification*; it is what can not be *justified*.<sup>102</sup>

This impossibility finds its expression in the exclusive directedness towards the *visible world*, which becomes the sole source of motivation and explanation – the substitutes of *justification*. Soul infected by evil keeps trying to fill the expanding emptiness; it keeps *thirsting* for *justification*, for "the desire for the bliss, which she had lost, remained with her even after the Fall."<sup>103</sup> *Justification*, however, can only come from *above*, while evil – seeing *nothing above* and declaring it to be void – must produce it itself. All it is capable of producing are arguments supposedly explaining the attitudes it develops and actions it performs; explaining, that is, demonstrating that this is actually right, natural, or even necessary, thing to do. "We are no guiltier in following the privative impulses that govern us than is the Nile for her floods or the sea for her waves." Being the lack of *justification*, evil always tries to explain, that is, excuse itself.

A common form of such attempts at self-justification is to point to the actual evils in the world. This form may display rare ingenuity in the search for evil, so that eventually nothing remains which would not appear affected by it. But a "good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."<sup>104</sup> Using some evil as a justification of anything is dubious, if not directly dangerous, for a step from there to justification of more evil is invisibly small. A rigid moralist defends the world against all evil which lurks behind people's back, without them noticing it. As a matter of fact, he only tries to defend himself against his progressing *alienation*. But finding evil in all corners of the universe and human soul, this defense only strengthens the adversary; it multiplies evil instead of diminishing it – multiplies it at least in the soul which sees it everywhere and forgets "that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?"<sup>105</sup> A profound moralist, whether of a revolutionary or pietistic flavour, will often turn out faultlessly cynical in his *actions*, which no longer aim at the person but only at the evil hiding behind. And thus, "[i]n morality, man treats himself not as an «individuum» but as «dividuum»."<sup>106</sup>

Evil used as a justification only increases the need for more evil and when it does not find it, it produces it. "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."<sup>107</sup> Eventually, "people who are completely debased find pleasure exclusively in other people's unhappiness." The ways in which evil spreads are innumerable, so we only notice its general tendency to expansion, if not to self-strengthening, which begins with 'seeing evil around' and which serves as the means of supposed self-justification.

43. This ability to expand and pollute all *visible world* around, to universalise itself in the impossible search for *justification*, characterises the activity of evil. Now, the long tradition (going at least back to Origen and Plotinus, even Plato) used to deny being and, consequently, also any activity to evil. St. Thomas' argument should be both sufficiently representative and detailed: "A thing is said to act in a threefold sense. In one way, formally, as when we say that whiteness makes white; and in that sense evil considered even as a privation is said to corrupt good, forasmuch as it is itself a corruption or privation of good. In another sense a thing is said to act effectively, as

<sup>100</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q49.a3

<sup>101</sup>We are not, of course, speaking about any *actual* grasp on the *absolute* which is missing. (An aspect of evil is to both deny the *absolute* and identify it with something *visible*.) "Reaching the *absolute*" refers to the continuity of being, *existential openness* to the *other world* *founding* steadiness in *this one*. It has nothing to do with epistemic, nor other *actual*, pretensions. We will return to this aspect.

<sup>102</sup>J. Nabert, *An Essay on Evil*.

<sup>103</sup>J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. IV 777C-D

<sup>104</sup>Mt. XII:35; Lk.VI:45

<sup>105</sup>Mk. VII:18-19

<sup>106</sup>F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*. II:57

<sup>107</sup>Mk. VII:21-23

when a painter makes a wall white. Thirdly, it is said in the sense of the final cause, as the end is said to effect by moving the efficient cause. But in these two ways evil does not effect anything of itself, that is, as a privation, but by virtue of the good annexed to it. For every action comes from some form; and everything which is desired as an end, is a perfection. And therefore, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv): "Evil does not act, nor is it desired, except by virtue of some good joined to it: while of itself it is nothing definite, and beside the scope of our will and intention."<sup>108</sup>

We have agreed to the last point, namely, that evil is willed only as a good, as a misunderstood good. The second point seems to be left rather uncommented, but it refers probably to the fact that efficient cause must be a being, and as such it is good (we will return to this point shortly). Formal causality, mentioned first, does not seem to worry St. Thomas as any real activity. Probably rightly, for there is not much 'real causality' in it. These Aristotelean causal schemata do not appeal to us any more and, today, we would not consider a subsumption of an instance under a general concept as any form of causality. But this is all St. Thomas is willing to grant evil: it acts (causes) some evil in the way whiteness makes white.

If I murder a man, I may grant myself the consolation of being, at the bottom of my heart, good and, moreover, of not willing anything evil by this act. But I committed it and the 'privation of good' which occurred is not a mere formality of classifying an instance under a general rule – it was not death which made the man dead, it was me; and it was not any abstract, formal principle of evil which *committed* this evil act, it was me. So I, a being ultimately "good is the accidental cause of evil."<sup>109</sup> But the very fact that I accidentally cause evil is itself due to some evil development, is due to the fact that I am affected by evil – not formally, not as a mere principle of classification, but most really. What hides (or at least, can be found) in the sterility of a formal cause, seems often to be the most real process of *actualisation* of the *virtuality*.<sup>110</sup> Evil in which I participate, which *alienates me*, is capable of *actually* expanding this *alienation* – both within *my soul* and, through *my evil acts*, in the world. Once *present*, it tends to grow. And very often we do not even know that it is *present* and that it started growing until it is ... well, perhaps not necessarily too late, but often very late indeed.<sup>111</sup>

This is the main meaning of the claim that evil acts – left for itself it may, perhaps, eventually, effect its own self-destruction, but in the meantime it will try to infect everything in its vicinity. True, it always requires *me* to be around, as a tool; all its activity must pass through *my actuality*; everything it possibly can do, it can do only with *my hands*. Yet, it acts, that is, *actualises* itself, for after all, *I am not the master*. It unfolds like a hermeneutical spiral of self-elaboration: from the *virtual*, impersonal and *invisible* seeds, which mature and ripen unnoticed, to the eventual consequences, deterioration, *visible* dissolution and emptiness. The uprising of Satan, his fight against the good, finds place in heaven – the earth only observes the consequences.

This emphasis on the active element of evil may be a mere subtlety which does not reflect any significant disagreement – we follow closely the tradition which sees evil primarily (though not merely) as negativity. Indeed, we do. There is, however, another aspect of this tradition which is harder to swallow.

"[N]o Thing is contrary to God; no creature nor creature's work, nor anything that we can name <sup>44.</sup> or think is contrary to God or displeasing to Him, but only disobedience and the disobedient man."<sup>112</sup> "Disobedient" or, as we would say, alienated. St. Thomas does not stay behind that in optimism. "Every being, as being, is good. For all being, as being, has actuality and is in some way perfect; since every act implies some sort of perfection; and perfection implies desirability and

<sup>108</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I:q48.a1.r.0.4

<sup>109</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q49.a3.Obj5

<sup>110</sup> We have commented it in Book I, beginning of subsection 6.4, §163–§164. Otherwise, 'whiteness of a white thing' was dealt with under the discussion of *concepts* and supposed 'essences' in II: 1.2.2. Its difference from 'evil of an evil act' or, for that matter, anything which proceeds in *existence* from *virtuality* towards *actuality* should have become clear from the following sections 1.3-1.4 of Book II.

<sup>111</sup> "Whatever we nourish within ourselves, that grows: this is the eternal law of nature. There is within us an organ of dislike, of dissatisfaction, just like an organ of enmity, of suspicion. The more we nourish and exercise it, the greater it becomes, until it eventually turns into a terribly overgrown tumor which devours everything around, swallowing and annihilating all life-giving juices." [Goethe ]

<sup>112</sup> *Theologia Germanica*. XVI ["God is the supreme existence, that is to say, supremely is [...] Consequently, to that nature which supremely is, and which created all else that exists, no nature is contrary save that which does not exist. For nonentity is contrary of that which is. And thus there is no being contrary to God, the Supreme Being [...]" [St. Augustine, *The City of God*. XII:2]]

goodness, as is clear from a1. Hence it follows that every being as such is good.”<sup>113</sup> According to Pseudo-Dionysius, “evil hath no being, nor any inherence in things that have being. Evil is nowhere *qua* evil; and it arises not through any power but through weakness. Even the devils derive their existence from the Good, and their mere existence is good.”<sup>114</sup>

Common to all these variations on this neo-Platonic theme is the Aristotelian opposition between act and potency which coincides with that between perfection and imperfection and, eventually, between good and evil. Thus, everything which *actually* is must, indeed, be good. Devils, perhaps, in so far as they exist are good, too. But what about a torture dungeon? It might have arisen “not through any power but through weakness”, though St. Thomas would probably still argue that there is some perfection, actual power, in the mere fact of its actualisation. But even in the tradition which sanctified Aquinas, one can state that “evil is not only a lack of good, but a living and spiritual being, though one who is deprived and depriving.”<sup>115</sup> The unreserved ontological optimism does not appear plausible. Any thing, say a house, may be bad as this particular thing, it may be a bad house, but still, in so far as it *is*, its very existence, is good. But it does not seem possible to argue such a case! A concentration camp is evil and it is not an evil which merely deprives some substantial good – the very *fact* of its existence is evil, its very existence is evil. Evil not only “inheres in this thing which has being”, in fact, it constitutes its ‘being and essence’, for except for being evil, this thing is nothing, without being evil, this thing would no longer be itself. It won’t help to claim that its buildings might have been used for other purposes; it won’t help to blame the formal, nor even the material causes for the evil which accidentally inhabited this essentially good being – it is evil through and through, including all the involved engineering perfections; it is the more evil, the more such perfections it involves! The fact that it got *actualised* won’t help anybody to claim that somewhere, at the bottom, it must be good – it can only indicate that not only there is no equivalence between, but not even any implication from *act* to *perfection*, from *actuality* to goodness. The mere actuality, the mere fact of the existence of Birkenau must be very “contrary to God and displeasing to Him.”

45. That “every being, as such, is good”, that “[t]hings solely good [...] can in some circumstances exist; things solely evil, never, for even those natures which are vitiated by an evil will, so far as they are vitiated, are evil, but in so far as they are natures are good,”<sup>116</sup> that every *actualisation* as opposed to a mere possibility is good – this other side of the face which sees evil as a mere negation, which “by the name of evil [signifies] the absence of good” – can not, possibly, stay unmodified.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q5:a3.

<sup>114</sup>Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*. IV:34

<sup>115</sup>Paul VI, in *The Ratzinger Report*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Vittorio Messori, 1985 [Diabel,p?]

<sup>116</sup>St. Augustine, *The City of God*. XII:3

<sup>117</sup>And this not because something particular happened with Auschwitz, Stalin’s collectivisation or Khmer Rouge regime which would require re-evaluation of anything. The only special thing about it is that it happened recently. If any comparisons were allowed, one would have to admit that the fate of native Americans witnesses to evil much more powerful, long lasting and, eventually, more successful and hence more terrifying than the relatively brief, even if horrifying, excesses of Nazism. (The fact that it has been perpetuated by the countries which, at present, possess enough power even to adjust the official definitions of the terms like “genocide” in order to exclude their own case, is at most of only political relevance. [W. Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide!*] Many peoples disappeared not due to some processes which we might find excusable and understandable in historical terms, but as a consequence of intentional policies applying the most advanced technologies of the time for systematic extermination of other peoples. On the other hand, it does *not matter at all* if the intentions were mere suppression and subordination – in many cases it was more than that. What counts is the evil of the final effect – extermination – which is approximately as old as the recorded history. Describing his expedition against Damascus, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser II records various skirmishes: “I desolated and destroyed, I burnt it: 1200 chariots, 1200 horsemen, 20.000 men of Biridri of Damascus; 700 chariots, 700 horsemen, 10.000 men of Irhulini of Hamath; 2.000 chariots, 10.000 men of Ahab of Israel [...]” The expedition found place in 854BC., and similar boastings can be found on clay tablets and in chronicles ever since. That numbers are probably exaggerated does not change the fact that the mood and intentions are not. Extermination in battles does not change the fact of extermination, but people were more systematic than that. Assyrians of the Second Empire (after Tiglath-pileser III, 745-727BC.) are the recorded inventors of mass deportations of peoples with the object of breaking down their national spirit, unity and independence. Thus ended the existence of Hittites, whose wealth and trade passed into the hands of the Assyrian colonists after the fall of the capitol Carchemish in 717BC. Assyrians themselves disappeared from the history after the fall and demolition of their capitol Nineveh in 606BC. Romans were certainly not exterminators yet, was it merely their systematic warfare which left only residual rests after Celts who once populated most of Europe? Systematic neighbours left no traces after the ‘christianisation’ of Jatwingians, Prussians (the original Baltic people, not the Teutonic Knights and German settlers who claimed their place and name), Slavic tribes like Polabians, Abotrites, Liutizians, etc., etc.

Speaking abstractly, evil is a negation, but negation of what? For certainly, negation is not evil, that is, it is not always evil. In our setting it is negation of the *origin*, negation which turns *nothingness* into emptiness, which thus benefits the existence of its fundamental character of *confrontation*, negation which *alienates myself from the self*, and then, from others and all the world. In the derivative sense, everything which leads to and strengthens alienation is evil, too.

As the *confrontation* with the *origin* is *existence*, we may consider it as such, as *existence simpliciter*, to be good. Now, as St. Thomas says, "by the name of evil is signified the absence of good. And this is what is meant by saying that "evil is neither a being nor a good." For since being, as such, is good, the absence of one implies the absence of the other."<sup>118</sup> Besides the unclear use of implications<sup>119</sup>, this is a bit too abstract for us. We say that *existence*, as such, is good, but we would not say that, for this reason, its negation, namely *non-existence*, is evil. Not because it must be wrong but only because we do not know what that possibly could mean. What is "non-existence"? Is it the total lack of any *existence* whatsoever, the total lack of life? We might, perhaps, feel that things are better with life than without and agree that extermination of life would be evil. But if life had never appeared? It is hard to judge *contrafactuals*, especially ones with conditions excluding the very possibility of judgment. But it is also hard to imagine what inherent evil would be in the total *indistinctness*. So, would non-existence be the non-existence of Pegasus? Of a person we could imagine to exist? Of my grandfather (that is, the fact that he is not alive any longer)? Perhaps (but only a huge perhaps!), it might be OK if some of these now existed. But even then, this would not force us to see anything evil in their *actual* non-existence. Unless, that is, one wanted to see natural death itself as some evil, which would be to protest against the very character and nature of *existence*, that is, to restrain existing itself.

Evil is *alienation* – it is that which inhibits *existence* in *existing*, which breaks the continuity 46. between *actuality* and its *origin* and thus prevents their *confrontation*. But this inhibiting, this preventing is not the same as the flat negation: non-existence, lack of *existence*. *Alienation* amounts, so to speak, to closing off *existence* within some horizon, putting an artificial – because *non-actual!* – limit to its otherwise open unfolding towards its *origin*. It is a special kind of negation, a special form of it, and this specificity suggests to the language the word "evil", in addition to the mere "negation". An aspect of this specificity is that it is primarily concerned with *existence* and not merely (that is, generally) with all being. Evil is the event of human life, it is only in humans that evil can find a site for its unfolding, and it is primarily humans that it affects. "Indeed, our vices or sins, which are what are properly to be called evils, are unable to exist except in souls – that is, in good creatures."<sup>120</sup> One can hardly be evil towards dead things; one's destructive tendencies towards them may, at most, indicate some evil processes going on in one's *soul*, but these are only *signs*. One can be evil towards living organisms (which fall under our generous definition of *existence*), though here, too, the judgment will often see the *signs* of potentially greater evil: what seems most appalling in the image of a person molesting or even torturing an animal is not only the pain he causes but the question "What must be going on in him? What a rotten person he must be!" Eventually, evil affects only human being, "yet it never consumes it." Things solely evil cannot exist in so far as evil is the accident of human existences. These – *and only these* – are, in so far as they *exist*, good.

In the derivative (and this does not mean metaphorical nor weaker) sense, things can be evil to the extent they serve evil. But unlike *existence*, things (and also *acts*) can be wholly and totally evil. That "evil always lessens good, yet it never wholly consumes it" applies to the *existence* which is affected by evil but is never totally underlined it. For evil is but the privation of *existence*, the *alienation* from the *origin*, which indeed is never complete. Things, on the other hand, or generally anything *actualised*, when *dissociated* and locked within the *horizon of actuality*, can become dead *signs*, epitomes of mere evil and nothing more. The problem with 'things' like concentration camps is that even a slightest attempt to look for anything good in them is inappropriate, if not directly detestable. They not only served evil purposes (while, perhaps, they could have served others) – their mere being is purely evil, as they epitomise nothing but the strength and depth of evil which was consuming the humans who invented and utilised them. They are thoroughly evil because

<sup>118</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q48:a1

<sup>119</sup>Every "is" in this quotation is probably meant as and equivalence. Thus, first "being = good", and then not only "evil is a non-being, is a lack of being", but also "any lack of being is evil" – a disputable matter, to put it mildly.

<sup>120</sup>P. Abelard, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*. II:§401

they have no rest above the pure evil of their purpose, and of the precision in its execution – they are *actualisation* of nothing but evil. “[A] corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”<sup>121</sup> But while a corrupt tree can, sometimes, recover, its evil fruit, once it has fallen on the ground, can not.

47. The short history of mankind, according to Anatol France, is: “They were born, they were suffering, they were dying.” But the fact that all kinds of ‘evils’ are a constant element of human history, and every individual human life, that “ye have the poor always with you,”<sup>122</sup> does not entail the conclusion that “it is good for any evil to exist, although nevertheless no evil is good.”<sup>123</sup> Such a conclusion is motivated by a series of postulates, the most important among which are that, for the first, “everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause nothing can be created,”<sup>124</sup> then that all such causes converge in one common cause and, finally, that such a cause is itself good or for some other reason creates only good things. But we have replaced ‘cause’ with *virtuality* and ‘causation’ with *actualisation* through existence – the connections between the last effects and their first origins are neither so plain nor so *visible* and they may get corrupted at every stage. We can, nevertheless, discern the powerful existential call in the claim that existence of everything, even of evils, is good. It translates into a call to openness, *humble acceptance* of every particular as something, at its bottom, if not at its surface, good. In so far as this aspect is concerned, we are in full agreement. Also, such a *concretely founded* acceptance does in fact lend all the things the element of goodness, of *participation* in the *origin*. But such a goodness does not apply universally and unreservedly; it is not any fact of mere ontology which one can discern in the matter of the objective world if only one analyses things thoroughly enough – it, just as its opposite, is an *existential* possibility.

## 2.5 Attachment

48. Despair and evil are basic forms of *alienation*, of broken continuity of *traces* which no longer lead to the *origin* but stop short of it. *Alienation* results from denying the originarity of the *origin*, from the fundamental *spiritual choice* of *No* in which Psyche, following the doubts sown by the oracle and her wealthy sisters, not only prepares to kill but actually succeeds in killing her heavenly husband, Eros, whom she has never seen.

The *choice* is *spiritual* because, for the first, it is not made by *me* – it is made *above me*, but also *for me*, so that *I* carry all the consequences, as well as full responsibility, for it. There is, indeed, nobody to blame, and looking for excuses leads nowhere – psychology may know about suffering or sickness of the soul, but it knows nothing about damnation. For the second, the *spiritual* character amounts to the *absolute objectlessness* of the *choice*. It is not directed towards anything whatsoever, whether *visible* or *invisible* – it is lifted *above* all *distinctions* and directed towards *nothing*. *No* turns this *nothingness* into mere emptiness, total void, lack. It says: “there is no exit, because ‘outside’ there is only void”, “there is nothing in *nothingness*”, or perhaps, “*nihil ex nihilo*”. This refusal, the denial of the *foundation* in the *invisible origin* of *nothingness* is a *nexus* of several denials.

49. Denying the *invisibility* of the *origin* amounts to the claim of self-sufficiency. Things are *visible* and there is nothing which, at least in principle, could not be appropriated, embraced by the *actual* look, grasped by the *actual* power of our faculties. It is *I* who decide and control, *my life* is entirely the matter of my choices. The exclusive directedness towards *this world* denying that *I am not the master* and attempting to reduce everything to the *visible* and controllable can be called “*pride*”.

Freedom, in its negative form, is an aspect of *pride* in that *No* turns *nothingness* into emptiness and thus does not recognise anything which might be *above*. It is freedom to arrange the *visible* world entirely as *I* find it appropriate since, at the bottom, it is just the freedom from any higher commands which might be understood as limitations of *my free will*. The absolute autonomy, the absolute self-government of the *I*, the absolute freedom from … is possible only as a reflection of

<sup>121</sup> Mt. VII:17-18

<sup>122</sup> Matt. XXVI:11

<sup>123</sup> P. Abelard, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*. II:§412

<sup>124</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*. 28a

ultimate emptiness.

If *I* am something, *I* am in particular the source of my actions and achievements. And certainly, 50. I am, but here there is more to it – *I* am the *only* source of all that, and if it is not personally *me*, then it is ‘we’, a multitude of *Is*. But a multitude of *Is* is no *community* – it is merely a *totality* which does reduce to its components. So it is *I* who am the master and there is no reason for any indefinite *thankfulness* which, as a matter of fact, would actually offend my dignity. Since the *visible world* of *mine* is all that is, there is nobody to be *thankful* to, and nothing to be *thankful* for. On the contrary, there is a lot to be blamed, as whenever some evil makes itself effective. It is always *unclear* what actually is to be blamed, whenever one pronounces a *general idea* of the inherent evil, or at least, malice of the world. As with most *general ideas*, it ends as a mere statement of ‘the fact’ which only reflects a *quality* of one’s life. This statement is, too, an aspect of *No* – let us call it “*ingratititude*”.

Nothingness surrounding everything is a mere void, while *this world* is here, that is, out there, 51. actually, in a very definite, objective sense. What it is is not easy to say, and the most natural intuition is that it is all that is *visible*, the *totality* of all things, facts, people. These facts and things, having at most some causes but no *origin*, are *experienced* as given; the variety of *visible distinctions* is found with the unmistakable stamp of being there, being ready-made.<sup>125</sup> This certainly offers an inexhaustible field of possible inventiveness but, in the *spiritual* sense, it is a *closed* – because dead – world. It does not invite to unconditional acceptance of whatever one might meet but, on the contrary, to separating and *dissociating* – things from things, people from people – to searching for and selecting only what is agreeable. Although such a world is potentially open, in the sense unlimited and indefinitely flexible, the very definite givenness of its building blocks, the Sartrean ‘in-itself’ of its ‘hard facts’, marks it by a kind of rigidity and stiffness – let us call this aspect of *No* “*closedness*”.

Pride, *ingratititude*, *closedness* are but aspects, only a few aspects of the *spiritual No*. As the 52. fundamental reduction of the ultimate *invisibility* to emptiness, it amounts to self-centredness or – what is here a synonym – world-centredness. Attachment is *No* to the ultimate *origin* said through the *exclusive* directedness towards *this visible world*.

No does not necessarily signify hatred, nor evil, nor despair, though it eventually manifests through such forms. Attachment, with all its aspects, is a *spiritual* attitude, that is, addresses *nothing* (even if it is not directed towards it) and does not imply any unique ways of *actual* being and thinking. It is not necessarily evil nor despair, it is not necessarily egoism nor egotism, it is not even necessarily selfishness. It may involve unselfish *acts* and attitudes, but the very fact of their being unselfish reflects the underlying attachment to the categories of *mineness*. One may truly attempt to reach beyond *oneself*, to establish and live according to some unselfish principles. One may – and, indeed, one often does – make absolute claims. But this absoluteness inevitably degenerates into a mere universality, a crude subsumption of all thinkable instances. *Visible world* is what is *below me* and *I am my life, my life is my world and my world is myself*, II: §§68 ff, p. 138. The two can not be dissociated: attention to *myself* happens already within the horizon of *visibility*, and preoccupation with the *visible world*, in whatever form, involves *myself*. Narrowing the attention exclusively to *this world*, *I* narrow it to *myself*. Whether *I* do it in a selfish or unselfish mode may make a difference to adolescent psychology or sterile ethics, but *spiritually* both – and, first of all, the very opposition itself! – amount to attachment.

The names of manifestations of attachment are “plenty” and easy to imagine. We therefore only sum them up in saying that attachment is the pattern of all *idolatry, absolutisation* of the *visible world*.

### 3 Spiritual choice of Yes

In a Sumerian myth (written down at around 1750 BC.) Inanna, the queen of Heaven and Earth 53. (or else, the goddess of love, fertility of nature and war), “from the Great Above opened her ear to the Great Below”, to the moaning call from her sister Ereshkigal, the goddess of the Underworld.

---

<sup>125</sup> Heidegger would say ‘ready-at-hand’, though he would all too definitely identify that with technical manipulation. Sartre might say that they are ‘in themselves’ – things turned into dead *objects*, even others enslaved by the restless freedom of ‘for-itself’. It is this extreme possibility we are intending here.

Descending to the Underworld, Inanna is on the way stripped naked of all her clothes by the servant of Ereshkigal. After 3 days in the Underworld, she returns helped by her dedicated servant and a cunning plan of the god of Wisdom and Water, Enki, which seems to fool moaning Ereshkigal. (In some versions, to leave the Underworld, “she must provide someone in her place”, and the one is Dumuzi, her husband, the Shepherd or the Lord of the Sheepfolds, ensuring fertility and fecundity, who now has to leave the world for the half of every year.)

The theme of the descent and the challenge of facing nakedness, isolation, helplessness, recurs frequently in later Indo-European mythology. Looking for his way back to Ithaca, Ulysses had to descend to Hades, so that the dead seer Teiresias could “tell you about your voyage – what stages you are to make, and how you are to sail the sea so as to reach your home.”<sup>126</sup> Orpheus had to visit the house of shadows to regain his love Eurydice (who however dies again on the way back, because of Orpheus’ turning around against the prohibition of Hades). Heracles was granted immortality on the completion of the 12-th labour – capturing Cerberus, the guard dog of Hades (whom, on the god’s command, he had to defeat with bare hands).<sup>127</sup> Paradigmatic (though written down only in the second century AD. by Lucius Apuleius) is the story in which Aphrodite, in her attempts to annihilate Psyche, orders her to fetch some water from Styx and then even to enter the Underworld and obtain a piece of beauty from Persephone. Only successful completion of these tasks (with some help from Eros) leads to the final recognition of Psyche’s right to her divine husband and the grant of immortality.

Among other variations, involving additional aspects but still centering around the same theme of temporary isolation before renewal or rebirth, we could mention the common motif of the child who, threatened by the envious ruler, is led by the mother to a seclusion or remote country.<sup>128</sup> Sometimes, the future hero is abandoned in the mountains,<sup>129</sup> or else placed in a boat or chest which, put adrift, reaches safely some shore far away from the civilised dwellings and where the hero is helped and reared by modest people or even animals.<sup>130</sup> Likewise in the myth known already to the Sumerians and Hittites, the deluge, sent by God as a punishment and for the purification, is survived in the isolation on the ark only by a few God-chosen ones.<sup>131</sup> A less dramatic variant is that of being hanged – as if suspended, in a thin air, in a state of isolation and helpless awaiting for relief or enlightenment, as in purgatory. Jesus’ death on the cross was but the first stage before descent. In Tarot, the Hanged Man is the card signaling a state of solitude and submission to divine will, suspension between the forces of heaven and earth and sacrifice bringing mystical knowledge and redemption. Odin had hanged head down from the World Tree, Yggdrasil, for nine days, pierced by his own spear, thereby acquiring sacred wisdom, learning nine magical songs and eighteen magical runes. Scholars not willing to see in this Norse myth merely a garbled version of Christ’s crucifixion, point out other related motifs: in shamanism, climbing of a World Tree by the shaman in search of mystic knowledge is a common religious pattern; sacrifices, human or otherwise, to the gods were commonly hung in or from trees, often transfixated by spears.

54. We certainly do not intend any review of mythology nor any elaborate interpretations. Hanging in the air may have vast structural differences from surviving a deluge, while we only want to see in both the aspect of isolation and complete immersion in the elemental power. We do not want to see the descend and rebirth as identical with, nor even as related to the cycles of nature, the eternal return of the seasons. We see it purely existentially – rebirth is not a cyclic event of nature, but a unique possibility of existence.

We want to see all the above as examples of the same pattern: the *necessity* of a lonely descent to the Underworld, of surviving the flood (locked in a chest or ark), of temporary isolation in the air – in order to revive, to obtain the ultimate reward, enlightenment, salvation. “Christ’s soul must needs descend into hell, before it ascended into heaven. So must also the soul of man.”<sup>132</sup> This often postulated necessity, the assumption that the way to paradise must lead through hell,

<sup>126</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*., end of X

<sup>127</sup>For our purposes, the Underworld can be considered synonymous with hell, though more detailed distinctions and comparisons are easily possible. In order to keep analogy, we won’t count Elysium, the Isles of the Blest, as part of the Underworld, while Tartarus, the place of ultimate punishment, should certainly be included.

<sup>128</sup>E.g., Abraham according to the midrash *Ma’ase Avraham*, in *Bet Ha-midrash*:25ff.; Jesus.

<sup>129</sup>Paris; Oedipus; Cyrus the Great (who, according to the legend in Herodotus, *The Histories* I:108-113, was not so abandoned only thanks to the disobedience of king’s executioners.)

<sup>130</sup>Moses; Romulus and Remus; in some versions Oedipus.

<sup>131</sup>Utnapishtim from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, ‘the first man’ Manu from the Vedas, biblical Noah, Greek Deucalion.

<sup>132</sup>*Theologia Germanica*. XI

causes us some trouble. Although suffering plays a fundamental role in the development of a person, it does not follow that also hell is necessary. This necessity seems to arise only when the ultimate reward has the character of enlightenment, is somewhat associated with knowledge. The knowledge-thirsty Odin hangs himself from Yggdrasil exclusively for the sake of sacred wisdom; gnostics, equating salvation with insight, have to go through the evil world only to renounce it. Al-Ghazali makes this relation to knowledge very clear: “For were it not for night, the value of day //would be *unknown*. Were it not for illness, the //healthy would not enjoy health. Were it not for //hell, the blessed in paradise would not *know* the //extent of their blessedness.”<sup>133</sup>

### 3.1 Being and knowing

It is not necessary to *actually* know in order to be; it is not necessary to know that one is in hell 55. to be there. Past visit in hell may intensify the *actual* realisation that one is not there any more; the realisation which, perhaps in itself, can mean that one is in heaven. But it is not a necessary precondition for being in paradise, for it is equally unnecessary to *actually* know that one is in heaven in order to be there. Active search for heaven is the more suspicious, the more *visible* it is, and the doubts about its genuine character coincide with the doubts about the value of knowledge as such – or, more generally, of the *actual signs* – of heaven.<sup>134</sup>

The insistence on the necessity of a passage through the heart of darkness, in order to reach the light, need perhaps not, in itself, be a sign of a gnostic dualism. But it has similar origins in an intellectual bias towards the *visibility* of *actual* manifestations and demonstrations. It is not necessary to know in order to be, but knowing one pole of a contradiction requires and implies knowing the other. It is the earlier experience of hell which, when contrasted with the experience of heaven, clarifies the latter and makes the fact of its presence *visible*. The myths of descent, or Underworld in general, often have this aspect, too, though it is less dramatic and less visible. Entering the Underworld involves helplessness, nakedness, or else oblivion and forgetfulness. Persephone takes away the memories and understanding from the souls entering there – Theresias was one exception, but otherwise, the Greek dead (at least those who did not end in Tartarus nor Elysium) are shadows hardly aware of their state. Only those who manage to return from there retain their mental powers or, as we might say, the strengthened consciousness of their present state as opposed to the dark oblivion of the Underworld. Similarly, the flood does not serve the purpose of purifying the survivors. They survive it because they have already been pure, or as the myths have it, selected by god – the flood only clarifies the scores, makes the predestined results *visible*.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, we distinguish clearly the two aspects: on the one hand, the *invisible* event of being selected, the God’s decree which for the *actual* understanding can easily appear as an arbitrary predestination and, on the other hand, the *actual* knowledge, the *visible manifestations* of this fact.

Knowledge and being are closely related but neither is any simple function of another. Some forms 56. of knowledge are impossible without some forms of being and knowing something may promote particular way of being. As always, we will stay satisfied with few necessary conditions without looking for the sufficient ones.

Most abstractly, knowledge is a relation while being *participation*. One might immediately object that *participation*, too, is a relation but it is not. (At least, we now want to make a distinction which earlier might have been blurred, even by using the word “relation” for *participation* as, for instance, when speaking about being as an asymmetric ‘relation’.) A relation, a reflective

<sup>133</sup>A. H. al Ghazali, *There Is No evil in Allah’s Perfect World*. 56-60 [after A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*. p.54; my emph.]

<sup>134</sup>“If any one saith, that a man, who is born again and justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; let him be anathema.” [The Council of Trent, . VI:XVI.On Justification.15]

<sup>135</sup>An element of arbitrariness in the selection of the survivor by the god appears in most flood myths: Utnapishtim is chosen by the goddess Ishtar (the Babylonian counterpart of the Sumerian Inanna), or sometimes Ea/Enki (Tablet XI) for no apparent, in any case no mentioned reason; when JHVH decides to destroy the world with the flood, Noah simply “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” [Gen. VI:8]; Deucalion was a Greek, so reasons and explanations get longer, though the bottom line remains unchanged – he was warned about the flood by his father, Prometheus who, although not a god but only a Titan of second generation, was as such immortal. In the Hindu version it is ‘the first man’, Manu, who is warned by a fish about the coming flood (in *Mahabharata* the fish is identified with the god Brahma, while in *Puranas* with incarnated Vishnu).

relation<sup>136</sup> presupposes *distinct* entities which it binds together. Relation to *Y* requires *Y* to be something else, something alien, remote, opposite, not-mine – it requires a distance, and if there is no distance, the relation will create it. This distance appears as the distance separating *me* from *Y*, but at the bottom it is the distance separating the poles of the relation from their being. In short, relation, a *reflective* relation, presupposes prior being of its poles.

*Participation* is that which *constitutes* this being. Although it involves the *separation* of the participating being, it is not a relation, for it makes the poles not merely related, but intimately involved into each other. To the extent various relations appear as *traces* of prior *nexus* from which their *aspects* have been *dissociated*, we might even say that *participation* is the limiting case, or rather the initial stage, when the *distinctions* have not as yet resulted in *dissociation*. *Participation* in *Y* requires *Y* to be ‘greater than me’: I do not participate in my acts – I perform them; I do not participate in my life – I live it. Yet, this ‘greater than me’, although *above me*, is not an opposite and distanced pole of a relation but, on the contrary, something which embraces and is embraced, something very intimately mine, eventually so much mine, as my own definition, as the ground of my very being. We could say that *participation* is the relation which is not ‘added’ to the given entities but which constitutes their very being. But this mode of speaking tends to conflate the *horizontal* and *vertical* dimension and, like the assumed spatial analogies of spirituality, confuses rather than clarifies the latter.

Knowledge is concerned with appropriation of the alien element, it stretches always beyond itself trying to reach what is out there, remote, in fact inaccessible, because by its very nature, separated by the distance. It extends along the *horizontal* dimension of *transcendence*; having fixated the ‘subjective’ pole, it now tries to extend its scope along the categories and distinctions pertaining to its level: as a *subject* it reaches towards the *object* and the objective; as an *ego* it thirsts for *more*; as *me* it searches for what is not-mine, whether psychological insight, subordination or understanding of others, personal love, alternative worlds...

Being, on the other hand, is concerned at most with dissemination and radiation, it does not search, it finds; it is quiet and peaceful. It does not have to search because it already is, it does not have to climb the *vertical* steps of transcendence, for these steps reflect only the perpetual anchoring of *actuality* in its *founding origin*. Being is the presence of the vertically transcendent element, eventually, the presence of the *origin*.<sup>137</sup>

Knowledge, as a relation, is always *founded* in being – not of its *object*, but of itself. Relation binds the *distinct* poles and knowledge asks only about ‘being’ of its opposite pole. But it is the being of the whole relation which *founds* it and its poles. The *object* of my understanding and the concept by which I understand it are opposite poles of a relation, they are in no way the same. But they both originate from a higher unity, from the *distinctions* made in the texture of experience, of *chaos*, eventually, of the *indistinct*. It is only *actuality* which definitely *dissociates* the *subject* and the *external object*. Knowledge, as a *reflective* enterprise, fixates the *actuality* of a *subject* dissociated from the *object* and keeps asking about their coincidence or, at least, relation. In this way, it is indeed determined by the character of its *object*, or rather, of that which it makes into its *object*. As contents are fetched from different levels, knowledge must adjust its character to the *distinctions* pertaining to the respective contents. Thus, what we call “knowledge” is much more than what is usually so called. We will now relate this abstract discussion to various levels and will recover the more common meaning as the *objective* and *actual* form of the general notion. The points 1. -4. below summarise the respective subsections 1.1-1.4 from Book II.

1. At the lowest level, *actual* contact with an *object* is a form of knowing. Whether the *object* is given physically – sensed, perceived or felt – or else only ideally – ‘thought’, remembered or imagined, in a complete *externality* – is not so significant here: it does not change the fundamental importance of its proximity and *immediacy*, inscription within the *horizon of actuality*. The constitutive feature of this, say *immediate* knowledge, is on the one hand its total *dissociation* from its *object*: the *object* is known (felt, seen, sensed, imagined) but remains *external*, that is, not affected by the relation; and on the other hand, it is the emptiness of the *actual concept* which here reduces to the pure *immediacy* of *distinguishing* ‘this’, the mere consciousness *that it is*. It is the knowledge of ‘this’ not being ‘that’ without, perhaps, being able to specify the difference; it is

<sup>136</sup>That is, not a reflexive relation, but a relation as perceived by *reflection*.

<sup>137</sup>In I:§15, p. 6 and then in 6.3, we said that ‘to be is to be distinguished’. And this remains the most generic notion. But being we are talking about now is a more specific being in a more specific context, namely, the being of *existence* in relation to knowing.

the knowledge with which I know my body, without knowing anything *about* it, it is the knowledge of any *distinctions* and their limits *dissociated* to the limit of *immediacy*.

*Subject*, i.e., the subject of this form of knowledge, apparently exhausts its being in the relation to such an *external object*. But this is only apparent, immanent description of the relation. *Subject* is not by *acting* or *reacting* (cognising, perceiving, feeling, etc.) within this horizon of *immediacy*, but only because it is immersed in the *vertically transcendent* element, because it emerges from a higher level as an *actualisation* of *ego*.

**2.** Essentially the same, though more developed kind of knowledge remains valid at this higher level of *actuality*, where *concepts* of elaborate *reflection* yield understanding of *complexes* – internalised through this understanding, but appearing all the time as the residual *externalities*. This *dissociated* form of knowing, *episteme* (whether of *actual* or purely *immediate* kind) allows one to ruminate on the general characteristics of knowledge and its acquisition, on the methodology of science, on the most universal laws of reason, etc., etc., etc. To ask any epistemological questions, one has to assume that the crucial aspects of knowledge can be treated independently from its object. Such a possibility obtains because one has already decided the scope of investigation limiting it to the *objective* knowledge. Whether it happened only with Galileo, Descartes or already with Aristotle does not concern us – we stop here with the *objective* (i.e., *actual* or *immediate*) knowledge, constituted by the *dissociation* of the *conceptual* modeling from the modeled, *external* realities.

Again, although the subject of such a knowledge, *ego* (or what often tries to hide under the depersonalised entities like ‘mind’, ‘intelligence’), spends its time on associating and dissociating, matching and modeling, its *being* is never exhausted by such relations. *More work and thinking* may generate only yet *more work and thinking* but it never reaches any *being*. To get a sense of it, it has to notice the real person, *oneself*.

**3.** As we move higher up in the hierarchy of being, the *dissociation* of the ‘*objective*’ and ‘*subjective*’, or – let it be allowed to say – of *being* and *thinking* (*knowing*), becomes less and less *precise*. Being an immoral bastard is not at all affected by the fact that the person knows it. Depending on what one knows and how, it may make the immorality more cynical and repulsive, or else more amiable in its understanding of fallibility; in some cases, it may even indicate a direction of possible change. But by “*knowing that I am immoral bastard*”, we refer here to the *objective* knowledge of the fact ‘*that...*’ This knowledge actually includes knowing various ‘*whys*’, ‘*hows*’, ‘*whats*’ but all these only signal a level of increased *reflection*, that is, *dissociation*. (The more systematic analysis we attempt, the more confusion seems to result and, eventually, the more all our self-knowledge seems to reduce to the mere ‘*that*’ from which we started.) It is no particular art to know ‘*that*’ one is a bastard, the big art is to cease *being* one. Even stupidity usually knows itself to be stupid – it only can’t help it. This gulf between knowledge and being is a gulf between the *objective* knowledge and the horizon of *mineness*, the distance between the *actual* and the *non-actual*.

However, as we have moved higher up in the hierarchy of being, the *dissociation* became less and less *precise*, eventually, losing completely its justification, if not entire sense. *I am my life, my life is my world, general thought* are as ‘*subjective*’ as ‘*objective*’. Looking for any *objective* knowledge at this level amounts to reducing it to the level of *actuality*. It may be quite true that I am, indeed, an immoral bastard; it may be a fact, an *objective* fact. But no such *objective* truth, nor any combination and sum thereof, ever capture the truth of *my being* – at best, they may express an aspect of it, approximate it. The merging of the ‘*objective*’ and ‘*subjective*’ aspect is reflected in a more intimate interleaving of *being* and *knowing*. Not only because here knowing is essentially knowing *oneself* (possibly, another person), but because this knowing, if knowing it still is, loses the *objective* character and does not any longer know so precisely what it knows.

The *general thoughts* expressed in literature or poetry, the thoughts of Vedas or Bible, the wise advice of old men or good friends – all these teach us something, we learn (at least we can learn) from them and thus, perhaps, increase our ... knowledge. Living through new situations, confronting new (or old) challenges, winning or losing, we learn something, but what is it that we so learn? We learn how to live, OK, but this does not say much. We learn but we do not quite know what we learn, we know more than a year ago, but we do not quite know what we know. We gather ‘*life experience*’ – we learn something about the world as much as about ourselves, for all that amounts to refining and clarifying the *relations* we have with the world and other people, and the ways we handle them. There is no need for making it explicit, it is knowledge

which lives in *my* body, in *my* instinctive reactions and habits, in *my* way of responding to and initiating things, in *my* way of creating and handling situations; only a tiny part of it becomes, occasionally, an *object* of explicit *reflection* or verbal expression, and even that happens only *post factum*. It is knowledge of life, of *my* life, and *my* life is only living this knowledge – the equality (not a *nexus*) which, once *dissociated*, will never return to itself even through the most dense and intense hermeneutical circles. To distinguish it from the *objective* knowledge, let us call it the “*life knowledge*” (or, just for the sake of it, “*sophia*”).

It is nevertheless knowledge, for it spans the relation between *me* and what is *mine* and, on the other end, *not-mine*. From this constant relation there emerges also the residual point, the noumenal *self* as the center of *my* being.

4. Somewhere at the bottom, past the bottom of one’s soul, and somehow, definitely though *imprecisely*, *clearly* though *vaguely*, one always knows *oneself*, one knows the basic mood and *quality* of one’s *life*. It may be merely recognition of the same, recurring doubts, recognition of something various moods of silence seem to intimate without unveiling. But beyond that, above all *visible signs*, one knows even more, one knows also if life is a generous *gift* or something else: a strange accident, a suffering of a constant trial without any goal or reason, only rarely interlaced with brief pleasures; or, perhaps even an unbearable damnation, a doom of eternal incarceration. This is no longer any *episteme* or *sophia*, any form of knowledge which one could utilise and apply; it is a mere insight, not any *actual* constatation of the state, but the mere state. It is *spiritual* knowledge which, at the risk of creating completely wrong associations, let us call “*gnosis*”<sup>138</sup>. It is knowledge of *nothingness* and is always a variation of one of the two main forms.

##### 57. ***Knowing Yes***

Eventually, at the *spiritual* level – the level where there are not only no *objects*, but no *distinctions* which could *actually signify* any *invisible* meanings, the level raised not only *above* the earth but also *above* heavens, like a wind which “bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth,”<sup>139</sup> “invisible [...] to mortal eyes, beyond thought and beyond change”<sup>140</sup> – at this level being is indeed knowing. This knowledge, however, must not be confused with *actual* knowing, *reflective consciousness*, which are only possible but never necessary *manifestations* of the *spiritual* state. Being and knowing are the same not because the *dissociated subject* and *object* mysteriously coincided, but because the *knowing* and the *being of the one who knows* are here indistinguishable; because *nothingness* of the *self* is *confronted* exclusively with *nothingness* of the *origin*, and thus there is no longer any distinction between the *horizontal* and *vertical* dimensions of *transcendence*; because the only possibility of this level is *participation* in the *one*. “He who knows I am beginningless, unborn, the Lord of all the worlds, this mortal is free from delusion, and from all evils he is free. [...] He who knows my glory and power, he has the oneness of unwavering harmony.”<sup>141</sup> This is not any ‘intellectualism’, any reduction of morality or salvation to knowledge, for the knowledge concerned is *gnosis*, the knowledge of and through being, of and through *participation* which is nothing else but a *concrete* form of this very *participation*. The *actual* knowledge of such truths is only abstract, it does not involve understanding and serves only at best as a preliminary stage, where the aspects belonging inseparably together are still *dissociated*.

In II:§98, we pointed to the primordial *spiritual* unity of being and thinking. This unity was not the result of any extension of *actual* knowledge, of any gnostic insights into the structure and details of *pneuma* and *pleroma*, nor of any idealistic coincidence of ‘subject’ and ‘object’. On the contrary, it was the result of a total lack, of the poor *nothingness* which, offering only *nothing*, does not provide any ground for *distinctions*, not to mention *actual* knowledge. In terms of *actuality*, this knowledge (if knowledge it is) is a mere knowing *that*, but *that* on the opposite end of the *immediate consciousness* ‘*that...*’, *that* which is not concerned with any *actuality*. It only knows itself to be an *existence*, a *confrontation*; *that actuality* is immersed in the *non-actual* element, *that I am not the master, that is* – are expressions of the same *that*.

<sup>138</sup>We are not intending here any *actual* knowledge, and hence any associations with any form of the traditional *gnosis* are out of place. In one respect, namely, in its complete lack of any dualism, it might be compared to the ‘optimist gnosis’ of neo-Platonic Renaissance which is opposed to the dualism of traditional ‘pessimist gnosis’ in F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*.

<sup>139</sup>John III:8

<sup>140</sup>The *Bhagavad-Gita*. II:25

<sup>141</sup>Ibid. X:3-7

In terms of *actuality* it is at best only a vague premonition, imprecise sense of ‘Something’, and often simply the straight negation. It does not imply *actual* consciousness and understanding, it is not exhausted in the *actual signs*, it is not by any necessity manifested in any particular, *actual* form. Its *sign* is rather silence, as when “the sage of silence, the Muni, closes the doors of his soul and, resting his inner gaze between the eyebrows, keeps peaceful and even the ebbing and flowing of breath; and with life and mind and reason in harmony, and with desire and fear and wrath gone, keeps silent his soul before his freedom, he in truth has attained final freedom.”<sup>142</sup> As a relation to the *absolute*, it is an *absolute* relation, relation which does not involve any *distinctions* except for the primordial separation. It is not an event of insight, nor is it an insight which leaves any permanent certainty about some *object* – it only leaves permanent certainty. It is a lasting, *spiritual* state which permeates the whole *actuality* with its *traces*, which sometimes even *actualises* in the revealing *signs*, but which, primarily, is *known* only in the sense of permeating the whole *actuality* with its aura, of putting its *invisible* stamp on it.

This *spiritual knowledge* is just the being of *spirit*. It is knowledge because it is relation (*separation* which *founds confrontation*), but it is being because this relation is *absolute*, because *confrontation* is simply *participation* in *one*, because there is no longer at this level any distinction between the *vertical* and *horizontal* dimension of *transcendence*. In terms of *actual* understanding, it is simply knowing *that*: *that I exist through confrontation, that I am not the master*, perhaps, *that I know nothing*. Being *actually* certain of any such *that* points in the direction of Yes. But if one asked: “How can anybody be certain of such a thing?” then one can only keep asking, for ‘how’ asks already for more (that is, less) than the *absolute nothingness*. One might only remember that there are many degrees of knowing *that* and the more definite interpretation man attempts, the further one is from actually knowing it. For the *actual* claims to verifiable certainty, it remains only an indefinite sense of gratitude and thankfulness which does not present, let alone fill, the soul with any thing nor image.

*That* is never given, *that* is something one can never see or feel, for any *actual* state or feeling is at most a *sign* which, unless already *known*, is most naturally ignored and reduced to insignificance. Thus it is something easily contradicted by all kinds of *visible* examples and arguments. Never being given, never being any *actual* ‘what’, such a *that* is ignorance rather than knowledge. ‘You will so ask: what does God effect without ‘image’ in the foundation and essence of the soul. I am not able to say that, because soul’s faculties can perceive only through ‘images’. And because the images enter into her from outside, it remains hidden from her. And this is most salutary for her, because this ignorance tempts her with the mystery of something wonderful and makes her chase it. For she feels very well *that* it is, but does not know ‘what’ it is.’<sup>143</sup> *That* is beyond any ‘what’ and need no ‘what’ – and this is all to be known about *that*. Consequently, *that* can not be known without being it, because as long as I am not *that*, I really do not know it, my *actual* pseudo-knowledge of *that* never goes beyond the insecurity of a merely possible hypothesis, a vulgar idea of faith. The apparent paradox would be that, since existence is *confrontation*, every one knows *that*, too. Indeed, but in *actual* terms this *spiritual knowledge* has rather the form of ignorance, it takes only the form of a ‘merely possible hypothesis’, the one which is as difficult to accept as it is to get rid of. It is expressed by *thirst* and perpetual search for the ultimate. It is, in short, for the most unknowing knowledge – a mere relation to the *absolute* without any reflection in the *actuality*, a being reduced to knowledge which does not know what it is, which keeps searching for *more* without realising how little there is to be known. For in order to *know* it – not merely imagine it as a possibility, posit it as a thought experiment but *actually* know – one has to renounce the project of *actually* knowing, that is, dominating it, one has to *be* on the Yes-side. Living *No* it is impossible to know Yes, for living *No* means precisely accepting only *visibility* and denying any meaning to the ultimate *transcendence*. Living Yes, on the other hand, is nothing more than renouncing *No*. But what is renouncing other than dismissing what it renounces as unworthy or untrue, that is, knowing better? Living Yes may have almost any imaginable *actual* form and may involve any kind of *actual* knowledge. For the knowledge it *is*, is not concerned with anything *actual*, it is not knowledge of this or that, it is not knowledge *of* anything. It is only the vaguest peace of the ultimate *participation*, the peace which is known because it marks all the *actuality* with its *invisible* rest, yet which itself never *actualises*. If you

<sup>142</sup>Ibid. V:27-28

<sup>143</sup>Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. A:II.4.b my emph.]

try to point at it, to capture ‘what’ of this knowledge, it evaporates, but if you let it be, it remains with the most *clear presence* and *absolute certainty*. “In what concerns divine things, belief is not fitting. Only certainty will do. Anything less than certainty is unworthy of God.”<sup>144</sup>

##### 58. ***Knowing No***

The existential *confrontation* is nothing else but this *participation*, and even the most active *No* is only turning away from it, and thus is still *confronting* it. It might thus seem that *No* is a possibility of the same order as *Yes*, that it is but another alternative. It is, however, an event of different order – it does not reach the *absolute*. It only denies: refusing to be through *confrontation*, refusing to *participate* in the *origin*, it seems to remove this *transcendent pole* but, as a matter of fact, it only pushes it away at an inaccessible distance, reduces it to a mere relation, exchanges being for *mere knowledge*.

“To despair is to lose the eternal”<sup>145</sup> says Kierkegaard. Seemingly, one might know that one lost the eternal, but what *knowing* is that? What do *I know* then, what is it that I so *know*? Nothing, except my *actual state*, feelings of despair, irrecoverable loss, sense of damnation – I know the *distance*, impassable, from here to eternity. My knowledge may be quite correct, I may know how it feels and even what I feel but is it . . . knowledge? In fact, I have hardly any idea of what is going on, for it is impossible to lose the eternal, simply and plainly impossible. We live in it, whether we feel it or not, and the despair of the loss is the despair over one’s own *actuality* – not over the loss of the eternal but over the loss of the contact with it. Knowledge of the loss, of having lost the eternal, eventually, knowledge of being in hell, will seldom call things with such words. But it knows them because it lives them, it lives its *No*, and no matter how rosy all *actual things* really are, at the bottom it is scared by the gnawing suspicion of their insufficiency, of a great mistake. The lost eternal is the lost *spirit* or, as one used to say, the sold soul. But it is lost in spite of the fact that it can not be lost; it is only the feeling of loss one despairs over. The despair is real because it is deeply felt, but the loss which it pretends to reveal is completely untrue. The true despair is indeed to say something like “I have lost the eternal” and think that it may count for ‘*knowing*’, that it may mean anything more than a mere status report of one’s moods and feelings.

As with the *spiritual knowledge* of *Yes*, we are by no means implying that one always has full consciousness of *No*. For the most, we *actually* do not know it. This was the reason for objecting in §55 against the *actual knowledge* as a necessary *sign* of the *spiritual state*. The *actual knowledge* will often be an *inversion* of the factual state. Yet, *actually knowing No* may be also something like a prevailing sense of *ingratititude*, disappointment, meaninglessness or unreality which in the *reflective form* turn into negation of some of the earlier mentioned *that’s*: *I control my existence*, *I am the master*, *I know*. In the extreme cases, it may be also *actual realisation* that *I am damned*, which opens the doors to deeper hell. As hell, with its despair over mere *visibility*, is much closer to earth than the *invisible paradise*, it is easier to imagine a kind of certainty – coming close to the *actual knowledge* – of being in the former than in the latter. Any prolonged suffering gives an intimation and, however inadequate, an image of it. One has observed that traditional representations of paradise – whether in painting, sculpture or literature – are unbearably dull and monotonous as compared to the fascinatingly complex and eventful representations of hell. This could be classified merely as a result of the simple psychology of mass-media and news reports (according to which devastating tragedy sells better than peaceful happiness). We would, however, see here an expression of a deep difference: heaven generates few, if any, *visible signs*, it does not inspire our imagination with so definite images as hell does. And there is a good reason for it: the former is the point of ultimate *invisibility* embracing *everything visible*, and then the bare reflection of *nothingness*, while the latter is exactly its negation, not only directedness towards *visibility*, but *exclusive* directedness towards *visibility* and *only visibility*. The distinction between

<sup>144</sup>S. Weil, *Waiting for God*. Forms of the Implicit Love of God:Implicit and explicit love;p.139. Such a *spiritual knowledge* amounts to (a variant of) what has been called “ontologism”, for instance, of St. Bonaventura and his followers. Indeed, (1) the *absolute* is the first not only in the order of Being but also in the order of knowing (*gnosis* is the constant knowledge of Godhead, if not of God.) (2) This knowledge is intuitive, not abstractive – it really coincides with the fact of *existing*. The last point, (3) that in the light of the idea of *absolute* we acquire all other ideas, can be taken or rejected, depending on the meaning of “idea”. If it is an intellectual construction, proceeding from the *reflective dissociations*, then only its strife after unity reminds about this first knowledge. But if idea is taken as anything whatsoever which can be distinguished and conceptualised, then certainly it arises only from the *indistinct*.

<sup>145</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*. I:C.B.b.α.1

directedness and exclusive directedness (toward *this world*) is close to impossible to observe, and so the gnostic tendency to identify *this visible world* with the source of all and only evils (if not with the hell itself) is and will be the constant theme in the history of spirituality.

### ***Not a mystical state – its foundation***

59.

Since this might look like some obscure mysticism, let us clarify one crucial point. That an existence is a *confrontation* with the *origin* can now be said equivalently as: an *existence is its spiritual knowledge*, for this knowledge is nothing else but living it, whether one knows it *actually* or not. What we are intending must not be confused with any particular form of *actuality*, whether *actual* knowledge or some mystical states. Such states are often described as experiences of union, if not identity, experiences in which the seer “cannot then see or distinguish what he sees, nor does he have the impression of two entities; rather, it is as if he has become someone else, and no longer *himself*.<sup>146</sup> But such peculiar experiences are not at all needed, as they are at best only *actual signs* announcing a new mode of experiencing open to the *absolute presence* beyond any *actual* contents. Indeed, *nothingness* of the *self* is an *imago* of *nothingness* of the *origin*. “Just like Godhead is nameless and remote from any name, so also the soul is nameless. For it is the same as God.”<sup>147</sup> But *unity* is not union – in any case, not any understood flatly as some experienced coincidence with the *absolute*. With Eckhart, too, God (*deus*) is not the highest principle. His *Eynikeyt* is only soul’s identity with it and not with Godhead (*deitas*). But “God and Godhead are as different as heaven and earth. But heaven is still thousand miles higher. And so is Godhead above God. God becomes and passes by.”<sup>148</sup> We are not considering any *actually* experienced coincidence – whether of soul and God or of ‘subject’ and ‘object’. We are considering the primordial *unity* of the two dimensions – *vertical* and *horizontal* – of existence, of being as *participation* and knowing as *gnosis*, which only when *distinguished* at the lower levels, give raise to *actual* experiences and *dissociated* knowledge. Once *dissociated*, it is impossible to imagine the *unity* of the two, for imagining requires images while here every image is inadequate.<sup>149</sup> This inadequacy, when experienced as the absence and lack, gives rise to a search for an ‘adequate’ state, for a ‘true’ experience. But “[t]he mistake lies precisely in the search for a particular state,”<sup>150</sup> in the attempts to merely exchange one *actuality* by another.

Experiences of *unio mystica* are conditioned by the *openness* to the *gifts of the origin*, by the acceptance that *I am not the master*. Such experiences are probably the most intense *signs* of *self* and its direct *confrontation* with *one*. In a sense, one has to ‘forget oneself’ in order to become *self* and reach the *spiritual purity*. But ‘forgetting oneself’ does not mean ‘wiping oneself out’, only wiping out the *attachment* to *mineness*, the preoccupation with what is *mine* and what is not. As Gabriel Marcel would say, stopping the insistence on *having* the experience marks the beginning of *being* in it. It is still *I* who *am*, *I* who *am* experiencing, but the *concreteness* of this being of *mine* means only *humble* appreciation of the experience without dissolution in it. If this sounds like a paradox, then probably it is one, because it means suspension of the *dissociation* into *subject* and *object* and termination of the *objectivistic illusion*, according to which everything is an *object* and ‘real’ is only *actually visible*, only precisely discernible *objects* or *feelings* and not also some vaguely present rest.<sup>151</sup>

The *spiritual dimension of self* does not in any sense abolish *myself*. The *unity* is not, in any case not necessarily, any felt and *actually experienced* union, and it obtains whether one has

<sup>146</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:9.10

<sup>147</sup> Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. A:I.3.c ]

<sup>148</sup>Ibid. A:I.3.e

<sup>149</sup>It becomes equally impossible to decide the order of dependence: whether being precedes knowledge or other way around. The first sentence of the following suggests the former, while the last one the latter: “It is not possible for anyone to see anything of the things that really [actually] exist unless he becomes like them. This is not the way with man in the world: he sees the sun without being a sun; and he sees the heaven and the earth and all other things, but he is not these things. This is quite in keeping with the truth. But you saw something of that place, and you became those things. You saw the Spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you became Christ. You saw the Father, you shall become Father. So in this place you see everything and do not see yourself, but in that place you do see yourself - and what you see you shall become.” [*The Gospel of Philip*. ]

<sup>150</sup>S. Weil, *Waiting for God*. Forms of the Implicit Love of God:Love of the order of the world;p.111

<sup>151</sup>Both, apparently contradictory aspects, of ‘forgetting oneself’ and remaining oneself, are contained in the short formulation: “How, in fact, could God be all in all things if there remained in man something of man? His substance will no doubt continue to be, but under another form, another power and another glory.” [St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*. X] According to St. Bernard, the union amounts to harmony of wills, not to any confusion of substances.

such mystical experiences or not. Having them can at most make the otherwise only vaguely felt presence more clear. ‘Neither temporality nor the feelings of the soul are central to this state [...] The duration of the state is not significant to Plotinus, nor are the phenomenological characteristics evinced in the experience. These would be distractions to the soul’s true task, for they lie, in Plotinus’ taxonomy, at the level of sense-perception, an outwards directed aspect of the psyche. [...] It does not become something else, nor does it become absorbed at some moment into the One. Its union with the One is something that always obtained, but it had hitherto failed to grasp this fact adequately.’<sup>152</sup>

The *spiritual knowledge*, being a lasting state rather than a feeling, does not require the intensity of such *actual experiences* and, being essentially *non-actual*, it does not have to involve explicit consciousness. It is knowledge, but not any *episteme*, one can suggest it, but not grasp it, one can indicate *that*, but not describe any ‘what’ for all one *actually* knows is *nothing* and its eventual expression is silence. “It is only when you hunt for it that you lose it//You cannot take hold of it, but equally you cannot get rid of it//And while you can do neither, it goes on its own way.//You remain silent and it speaks; you speak, and it is dumb.”<sup>153</sup> Knowing thus *nothing* is the same as being *nothing*, and as such completely different from *actually knowing of or about nothing*.

60. One could recall here a long series of examples: Augustine’s observations that “one knows God better through ignorance”, and that one does not have any knowledge of Him “except that which knows that it knows nothing about Him”<sup>154</sup>; Spinoza’s *amor Dei intellectualis* comes probably close to what we intend, at least in the mood, if not in the exact content. Eckhart’s ‘unknowing knowing’, or *docta ignorantia* of his dedicated reader Cusanus, are of the similar kind. In the XX-th century, Karl Rahner advanced forcefully the thesis of the positive content of ‘incomprehensibility’ as the primary name for God. Even one thinking that the world is simply the *totality* of (logical) facts amenable to a complete analysis may be tempted to repeat the credo of negative theology: “and the hidden Mysteries which lie beyond our view we have honoured by silence”<sup>155</sup>, “God is invisible and beyond expression by words [... We apprehend] not what He is, but what He is not.”<sup>156</sup> There is, however, a big difference between ‘honouring by silence’ because one does not understand what – but expects that something – is hiding behind the veil, or else because the veil marks only the *absolute* border between the differentiated and the *indistinct*. The adjective ‘hidden’ is therefore useful only in a metaphorical sense: the *origin*, God – or, following Eckhart’s distinction, the Godhead – is hidden because no *visible* categories of understanding, based on *distinctions*, are applicable to the *indistinct* one. It is hidden but it is not hiding. For *reflection* this difference is crucial because we thus limit the understanding of the *origin*, *Deus absconditus*, merely against all differentiation, without endowing it with any contents, not to mention *objective* contents.

\* \* \*

61. Salvation is not enlightenment, yet knowledge taken in the deeper sense, the *spiritual knowledge that*, is an integral part of the transition. The transition amounts to this *spiritual knowledge* becoming, in one form or another, *concretely present*. This knowledge amounts to recognition of relativity of all *visible* things and here relativity means complete irrelevance for the *absolute* or, let us pretend some circularity, insufficiency for salvation. None of these things can help in finding exit and the awareness of this insufficiency is what was traditionally called “purity”. The most concrete way to this awareness goes through suffering – yet, suffering which does not break one’s person but liberates, that is, purifies one. Return from the Underworld is the extreme image of the most extreme form of it. One who has suffered *knows* what suffering is and ‘what’ of suffering involves unmistakably *that*. Suffering, depriving one of all *visible* hope, can break the *soul* which henceforth becomes capable only of clinching desperately to the reminders of its *visible* world as they turn gradually into insignificant emptiness. But one can also manage to go through it unbroken, which is possible only when one leaves all ‘whats’ where they belong and finds the source

<sup>152</sup>J. P. Kenney, *Mysticism and contemplation in the Enneads*. III

<sup>153</sup>Yung-chia Ta-shih [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*. I]

<sup>154</sup>St. Augustine, *On Order*. II:16.44, II:18.47 [after R. Heinzmann, ed., *The Medieval Philosophy*.]

<sup>155</sup>Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy*. XV

<sup>156</sup>St. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*. V:12, V:11

of strength *transcending all visibility*, beyond the doors opened miraculously in response to one's "Release me..." The self-respect resulting from such a trial has nothing to do with any feelings of complacency and satisfaction with *oneself*. It is a true respect for *self*, which has erased all pretensions to one's own power and abilities.

James distinguished between the religious attitude of once-born and twice-born. The first represents "the healthy-minded temperament, the temperament which has a constitutional incapacity for prolonged suffering,"<sup>157</sup> for whom "the world is a sort of rectilinear or one-storied affair, whose accounts are kept in one denomination, whose parts have just the values which naturally they appear to have, and of which a simple algebraic sum of pluses and minuses will give the total worth. Happiness and religious peace consist in living on the plus side of the account."<sup>158</sup> "Now in contrast with such healthy-minded views as these, if we treat them as a way of deliberately minimising evil, stands a radically opposite view, a way of maximising evil, if you please so to call it, based on the persuasion that the evil aspects of our life are of its very essence, and that the world's meaning most comes home to us when we lay them most to heart."<sup>159</sup>

Although the world is indeed full of charming superficialities and tempting platitudes, 'a constitutional incapacity for prolonged suffering' is almost a contradiction in terms. One could, perhaps, imagine some people whose goals and thoughts were so simple and means so rich that they could obtain everything they wished. But it seems like an idealised image, for everybody lives his *confrontation* and knows *that*. Many a one will try to escape from suffering, but suffering is exactly something from which there is no escape. "For there cannot be a 'suffering' at all except where something happens against one's will; no one 'suffers' when he accomplishes his will and when what happens delights him."<sup>160</sup> If you can escape from it, it may be a problem, a trouble, but not a suffering. A 'constitutional incapacity for suffering' might characterise suicide candidates, not healthy-minded temperament. Suffering is one of the fundamental forms of meeting ultimate *transcendence*, of being sentenced to something one can not stand and, by the same token, being called to *transcend oneself*. We do not make a distinction between those who can, or even need suffer, and those who can not – if it is a distinction at all, it is only psychological.<sup>161</sup> We distinguish between those who suffer but do not end in hell and those suffer and do. Hell is the extreme form of suffering, the place where the suffering, initially human, becomes, by being answered with the active *No*, almost inhuman, impersonal. Yes does not require a descent to such depths. Yet, besides the fact that suffering is a common lot and that some can, in fact, find themselves there, the opposition to hell provides the most clear illustration of the dynamics as well as the meaning of the *spiritual choice* of Yes. For just like *No* ends up substantialising its suffering as 'objective' evil, so Yes learns that salvation is the liberation from evil but not from suffering and that, in fact, the latter need not involve the former. We will therefore follow this opposition.

### 3.2 Yes

Our vocation is to listen – not to talk; to listen to the silent presence which fills our life with all its 62. contents. At the deepest level of our being, at the point where one becomes many, the *invisibles* become present in the ways which we can hardly feel, and never produce or control. Without any *reflective attention*, the *invisibles* are present as the most constant aspects – not moods, not feelings, not thoughts – which do not have any *objective* content and which do not pertain to any *object*; which therefore can be predicated of anything, though we will tend to ascribe them to the most general ideas, to life, world, existence.

The experience that *I am not the master* is what makes true listening possible. Since my control over all *visible* things does not exhaust my life, there are, perhaps, other voices worth listening to. In the *reflective experience*, the *invisibles* can be present as unreal dreams, impossible ideals, something we long for without any hope to obtain it – not because we are unable to hope, but because we are unable to imagine 'what' we are hoping for. Such dreams turn out to be much

<sup>157</sup> W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. VI&VII

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. VIII

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. VI&VII

<sup>160</sup> P. Abelard, *Ethics*. 18

<sup>161</sup> One could certainly look into James' personal fascination with Emerson, whom he mentions as an example of 'healthy-mindedness', and the opposition between his own post-war, depressive years and the idealised strength of Emerson's, as the origin of this distinction.

more ‘real’ than all the ‘reality’ of *actual* objects and situations, not only because they are more persistent but also because they persist with the calm and yet intense and irrefutable force. They do not go away as long as what they announce does not find a *concrete*, incarnate presence in our life. They are only images, always false ones, but these images remind us of something which, apparently forgotten, remains *present above* all our acts and activities, *above* all *visible* and *invisible distinctions*. “[...] and St. Philip said: ‘Lord, show us the Father and it will suffice us’, for the ‘Father’ indicates birth and not likeness, and it denotes the One in which likeness is reduced to silence and all that desires to be is still.”<sup>162</sup>

Imagine a man whose whole life was, by any reasonable standards, a series of failures and disasters, an unhappy, unrealised, misfortunate life. Then, when his last moment came, on his death bed he says: “I had a good, gratifying life.” And it is not misunderstanding of the words, it is not any self-deception. Do you think it can possibly make any genuine sense? – like a moment of revelation, when the *invisible* sense of his life becomes *manifest*, when he realises that this life was worth living, that the very fact of living is gratifying and deserves thankfulness. A moment when one hears “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be [...] in paradise.”<sup>163</sup> In spite of the wretched life, in spite of constant misfortune, “to day shalt thou be in paradise”. A ‘moment of truth’? But the same might have been true all the time, all his life, even if the man never recognised any *visible sign*.

63. We said that living No one can not say Yes, just like living Yes amounts to denying No. But then, having once ended in the No, perhaps, at the bottom of hell, one can not say Yes, so the story ends there. Perhaps, and often it does, but it is interesting – or, we should like to say, miraculous – that it does not have to.

Nihilism, despair, the deepest circles of hell are all consequences of *attachment*, eventual consequences of the declared and exclusive dependence on *visibility*. And thus, there can be no cure against them, for the only medicine one could possibly accept would have to be *visible*. Insisting on objectivity or truth, externality or proofs, one wants only one thing: to be convinced *in advance*, that is, to avoid the discomfort of trust, to keep one’s life unchanged. But he “that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”<sup>164</sup> The cure is only the change of fact into value, of the merely ontological *foundation* into the *concrete* form of it: *nothingness* is not emptiness but *origin* – “who shone//where nobody appeared to come”<sup>165</sup> – equally dark, silent and *invisible* as emptiness and yet, its complete opposite... This, however, is a *spiritual choice*, which can not be enforced by logic, arguments, sufficient reasons, efficient causes, anything *visible*. He who would like to be convinced, to *see* why and how he should choose so and what it is, will never see anything. What could one see in total darkness? There is no *visible* way out of No; hell is the place surrounded by void and hence with no exit, for one can not exit into void, “[o]ne cannot will into void.”<sup>166</sup> What could one hear in total silence? *Nothing*, indeed – the beat of one’s heart, the whisper of one’s breath. This, however, is no longer void. Nowhere happens more than in such a moment of silence, when nothing is heard because only *nothingness* whispers and *opens* one’s heart. “[A]nd I saw nothing then,//no other light to mark//the way but fire pounding my heart.”<sup>167</sup>

64. ***It has been there already.***

In 1.1 and 2 we described the gradual sinking into hell, as well as development of evil, as the results of misunderstood *thirst* for paradise. The culminating “Evil, be thou my good” conforms fully to the old claim that each being seeks the highest good and, as Scheler taught, that such a ‘highest good’ is, objectively and *a priori*, a value above any other, even if nobody *actually* knows what precisely it might be.

It has been common to see in such a highest good a return to some original state. Descent to the Underworld happens usually in search of something or somebody lost (Orpheus seeks Eurydice, Ulysses is only on the way back to his home, Innana wants to help her sister Ereshkigal). The survivors of the flood are from the beginning marked by God and the survival can be taken to correspond to the return among the righteous. “This excellence whose necessity is scarcely or not

<sup>162</sup> Eckhart, *The Book of Divine Consolation*. II

<sup>163</sup> Lk. XXIII:43

<sup>164</sup> Jh. XII:25; Mt.X:39; Mk.VIII:35; Lk.IX:24, XVII:33

<sup>165</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Poems*. Dark Night

<sup>166</sup> W. James, *What the Will Effects?*. [after G. Cotkin, *William James: Public Philosopher*.]

<sup>167</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Poems*. Dark Night

at all manifest to search, exists, if we could but find it out, before all searching and reasoning.”<sup>168</sup> Then the theme is repeated again and again: “in human soul there is engrafted desire of true good”<sup>169</sup> and the search for, and then *recognition* of it, is possible because the soul “did not forget itself completely”<sup>170</sup>; the soul *thirsts* because “the desire for the bliss, which she had lost, remained with her even after the Fall.”<sup>171</sup> And so, what she finds, is something that already has been there. “Thou wouldst not seek Me, if thou hadst not found Me.”<sup>172</sup> In II:§42 we have objected to Plato’s *anamnesis* theory of knowledge. But now we can recall it again and give it the place it deserves – not as a theory of knowledge, but as yet another record of the insight into the character of the true spiritual choice as an event of repetition and return.<sup>173</sup>

The choice of Yes means to recognise *nothingness* as the one, the ultimate *invisibility* as the origin. It thus returns to its source, and every return is a repetition. Here, it is the *spiritual* repetition of the only ontological event – second birth. As such, it will also lead to another repetition, the concrete counterpart of the ontological *founding*, but this will be addressed in 3.3. For the moment we are concerned only with the event itself.<sup>174</sup>

As one sinks into the hell of despair, one gradually accepts despair for its own sake, as the 65. inescapable lot and damnation. And one is advised to continue, for “whilst a man is thus in hell, none may console him, neither God nor the creature, as it is written, ‘In hell there is no redemption.’”<sup>175</sup> When one starts despairing, the only thing one can do is to despair more. But this despair is not any emotional complain, ruefulness, nor any sense of undeserved loss, which all reflect only the conviction of entitlement. Only heroes wander in the Underworld, for it takes courage and determination to say: “Let me perish, let me die! I live without hope; from within and from without I am condemned, let no one pray that I may be released.”<sup>176</sup> “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.”<sup>177</sup>

As long as it stops short of pronouncing the ultimate No, such a resignation is in fact an expression of deepest *trust* and *hope*. For underneath all despair and resignation, one has always an *invisible* reserve, a rest unable to accept the situation to which one has already given one’s consent, an *invisible* rest which underneath all “Let me perish, let me die!” says, in a silent, unheard voice: “I am damned, I can’t expect anything, so I have to perish. *But I do not want*

<sup>168</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:8.6

<sup>169</sup>Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. III:2.4

<sup>170</sup>Boethius, *Commentary to Isagoge*. V:3.22 [after R. Heinzmann, ed., *The Medieval Philosophy*.]

<sup>171</sup>J. S. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*. IV 777C-D

<sup>172</sup>B. Pascal, *Pensées*. VII:553

<sup>173</sup>The idea has innumerable appearances: “[I]t may be asked, is Brahman known or not known (previously to the enquiry into its nature)? If it is known we need not enter on an enquiry concerning it; if it is not known we can not enter on such an enquiry.” [Śaṅkara [after S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, eds., *Indian Philosophy*.]] The aspect of reminiscence/return can be found in the concept of *prolepsis*, which Clement of Alexandria borrowed from Epicurus in order to characterise faith as a preliminary stage of knowledge, an ‘anticipation’ of truths which are not, as yet, recognised fully by reason. We are very far from an understanding of faith as a mere approximation, an imperfect reason. But we would emphasize the aspect of *prolepsis* which makes it thus function as the light leading reason in the right direction [St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation*I:16, *Miscellanies* II:4]. It would be easy to see the intended meaning as a mere potentiality opposed to the actuality. But ‘anticipation’ in this context means rather a foretaste – which has not yet given up all the pretensions of actual reason – of virtual presence, the ‘desire for the lost bliss’ which underlies the search, though does not give it any definite direction. It is engrafted in all souls so that, indeed, “All beings in every starting point have a certain relation to the father and creator of the universe.” [St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation*. V:133.7 [after R. Heinzmann, ed., *The Medieval Philosophy*. p.38]] Augustine’s *memoria* expresses the same pattern: at the bottom, it is concerned with the eternal truth – when he searches his soul for God, he does not discover Him but *finds* Him... in the depths of *memoria*. The most recent form is the hermeneutics of Being, defining human being by its character of questioning the issue of Being which questioning, however, is pre-reflectively present and precedes any explicit questions.

<sup>174</sup>This double aspect – of re- and -birth, of repetition and new *foundation* – is expressed marvelously by the Greek expression *genetēte anōthen*. *Anōthen* is sometimes translated as ‘anew’, ‘again’ (e.g., “Except a man be born *again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God” or “Ye must be born *again*” [John III:3/7]) But more often, it means ‘from above’ (“He that cometh *from above* is above all”, “Thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee *from above*.” [John III:31/XIX:11] In Acts XXVI:25, it is rendered as: “Which knew me *from the beginning*.”) Likewise, *anagennao*, appearing in 1 Peter I:23, “Being born *again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible,” and meaning literally ‘to produce again’, is also used in metaphorical sense for having one’s mind and attitude changed. As is often the case, attempting to disambiguate such apparent ambiguities, is to confuse the issue rather than to clarify it. Both aspects are present and *second birth* is as much second as it is birth, as much a birth again, resurrection from the dead, as birth from the new *foundation above*.

<sup>175</sup>*Theologia Germanica*. XI, [Probably, reference to Ps. ILIX:8]

<sup>176</sup>Ibid. XI

<sup>177</sup>Job III:3

*to!!!*" This apparently childish and irrational act – not even of will, for it is a mere exclamation, and hardly any *actual* one but made at the bottom of one's soul – comprises the essence of the survival. Intensifying despair has the meaning, for only then one can reach the *invisible* seed of hope, expressed in such an event. This is the admission that *I am not the master*, that I would like to leave the place, but I can not do it on my own. It is a desperate scream for help and, as such, already an expression of trust. It is not any faith, it does not believe *in anything*, it does not hope *for anything*, it only turns towards *nothing* and admits, without saying: "This is unbearable". This apparent surrender, this deepest resignation in the face of *nothingness* is a *sign of trust*. As long as it does not say it explicitly, when it is no longer able to say it, then it really says: "Please, release me..." For "to believe in one's own undoing is impossible."<sup>178</sup>

66. One can reach such a surrender at various degrees of despair and humiliation which everybody can imagine for himself. What matters to us here is the fact, rather than the intensity, of the apparent paradox: the impossibility of any *visible* release and, on the other hand, the impossibility of accepting this lack, "that in human terms the undoing is certain and that still there is possibility."<sup>179</sup> Trust does not appear between these two – *trust is just the tension* of this, as one would like to call it, paradox, is just the ability to live (with) it.<sup>180</sup> It has a dual aspect of faith and hope, both understood in the *spiritual* sense, that is, without relation to anything *visible*. It is only admitting the unbearable character of the present state, is a mere reaction which, however, is directed *against* it, without recognition of any chance to overcome it. (Again, the *reflective* consciousness presents one only with the desperate and unbearable life, and knows little about the *trust* which underlies it.) This 'against' carries the character of faith, hides the impossible possibility of overcoming that which according to all *visible* signs can not be overcome. As such, it has also the seed of hope – not any definite hope as to how this impossibility could, perhaps, occur, but hope contained already in the very exclamation – disrespecting all the *visible* proofs to the contrary and asking for help where no possible source thereof can be seen. The help it is asking for concerns absolutely *nothing*, it is not help to do this or obtain that, it is not help *to anything*, for the one who is crying has not the slightest idea what he needs help to. In such a time, "[t]he soul knows for certain only that it is hungry. The important thing is that it announces its hunger by crying. A child does not stop crying if we suggest to it that perhaps there is no bread. It goes on crying just the same." "Release me..." – not pronounced loudly, not pronounced at all, but lived underneath the despair – that is all. Release me whence? How? Whereto? Who? The danger is not lest one does not find any answers but lest one forgets that one has ever asked. "The danger is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry."<sup>181</sup>

67. **Necessary, but insufficient.**

Yes says only that *nothingness* is fullness, that emptiness is untrue, that beyond it there is ... 'Something', and hence that there is an exit, even if *invisible*. The silent cry "Release me!" is the witness of that, for the most real is that which you can not live without. At the same time, the cry is also an admission that *I* do not have the power to exit on my own. After all, *I* do not see any exit. The *spiritual choice* says Yes at first only in the form of accepting damnation and despair and yet, in spite of that, not accepting it, nourishing somewhere in the depth the inadmissible *trust* that, after all, *I* won't stay here forever. This paradox reveals only the insufficiency of any *actual* choice (or, for that matter, of anything *I* can do) to effect the transition. All *I* can do is to say Yes, first in the deep silence of *invisibility*, then perhaps in a louder and more conscious voice. But saying so Yes is only saying that *I* am willing to accept the possibility of release, that *I* indeed ask, seek and knock and hope that "every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth;

<sup>178</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*. I:C.The forms of this sickness (despair)A.b.β

<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

<sup>180</sup>This is only an apparent paradox, because it appears so only "in human terms", from the perspective of *this world*, of one who expects sufficient, preferably even *visibly* demonstrable reasons. But the transition is, in truth, very well possible. "Health is in general to be able to resolve contradictions," so turning the lack of *visible* sufficient reasons into a 'contradiction' is then the exact opposite of health.

The Greek *pistis*, translated usually as "faith" or "belief", can be, and often should be, rendered as "fidelity", "assurance" or "loyalty". (This definiteness is even clearer in the primary verb, *peitho*, from which *pistis* is derived, and which means to persuade or be persuaded (e.g., Matt.XXVII:20,XXVIII:14, Acts XXI:14), to trust (Matt.XXVII:43, Lk.XI:22), to obey (Acts V:36-37).) Besides reliance, this incontrovertible faithfulness is the primary aspect of *trust*.

<sup>181</sup>S. Weil, *Waiting for God*. Forms of the Implicit Love of God:Friendship;p.138

and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”<sup>182</sup> The cry, knocking or, as we can also say, the mere consent *opening* one to the possibility, is all one can do. It is *equipollent* with the infinite patience because, as one can not do anything, all one can do is to wait. And “it is necessary that one has the patience to begin so, that one in truth admits, that it is a feat of patience”<sup>183</sup> and only patience, through which one gradually regains one’s soul. This patient waiting in *openness*, with or without clear consciousness thereof, calms down all the storms.

### *Gift.*

68.

The choice of Yes is only a necessary but not the sufficient condition of exit. As usual, we do not know the sufficient conditions, but here they have been given a name – “grace”.<sup>184</sup> Since we do not deal with the sufficient conditions, “grace” will mean for us simply the possibility of the apparently and humanly impossible, the fact that, although there is no *visible* exit, some people do return from hell. *Trust* is thus *openness* to the possibility of grace and both together can become effective only when I have said Yes, admitted that I am not the master, that “I live yet do not live in me.”<sup>185</sup>

*I am not the master* and so grace is a *gift*, a true – that is, undeserved (or, as a philosopher might prefer to say, unaccounted for) – *gift*. But it is not a gift from anybody, for I have not found any other, particular master. Just like *hope* and *thrust* are directed towards and ask into *absolute nothingness*, so grace comes only from there, it is a *gift of nothingness*. It did not come from any *visible* place; it is only all surrounding *nothingness* which is the source, the *origin* of this *gift*. One can receive gifts coming from no one, from *nothingness*, and one can likewise be thankful without being thankful to anybody. *Spiritual thankfulness* does not concern anything in particular – it concerns *nothing*, that is, everything. It is not even thankfulness *for grace*, for *thankfulness* is but an aspect in the *nexus* of grace.

### *Ex nihilo?*

69.

The spiritual choice of Yes finds *invisible* richness of the *origin* in the *indistinct nothingness* which for No remains an irrelevant void. Yes creates something which was not there before: from the deepest *thirst* for ‘Something’, from the thoroughly logical *actuality* of solipsism, perhaps, from the deepest despair of emptiness, it emerges into the full *presence*, from the knowledge that, it emerges into *participation*, into Being. It thus seems to create *ex nihilo*, from the total emptiness. It looks like an arbitrary decision, perhaps, a mere projection or a hypostasis, and those who like will always see it in such terms. But it is only the assumption of emptiness, the assumption that *nothingness* is indeed void, which makes everything that follows Yes into a mere projection. Such an assumption wants, first of all, to *see* some definite reasons which would oppose it, which would invalidate the sense of emptiness. But no such reasons can be given and then everything that follows turns into a void equal to that which is there from the start – in human, *visible* terms, indeed, *nihil ex nihilo*, “nothing can come out of what does not exist.”<sup>186</sup> In short, this is a way of saying No, and we are not concerned with it any more.

The choice of Yes does not create *ex nihilo* (which form of creation pertains to God alone). It turns alienation into *concrete participation* and thus, creates good from evil. It creates *participation* by *finding* the *origin*, non-emptiness, *finding* fullness where before it found only emptiness. To see here only a projection is the same as to see nothing, as denying the meaning of the whole event, as “dragging the revelation of the greater down to the level of one’s littleness”. In fact, it seems possible, at least logically, to maintain the doctrine of extreme, subjective idealism, of absolute solipsism, even of absolute immediacy (where the world is re-created every moment anew, though strangely enough, in the shape deluding us to believe that it is the same world as the one a moment ago.) The logical possibility of such doctrines illustrates only what such a possibility is worth as a criterion of anything. For any interpretation in terms of the *actual* knowledge, this ‘finding’ is impossible and untrue. In such terms a relation which requires being of one of its poles never counts as sufficient for being of the other; in such terms nothing, nothing ‘objective’ has been *found*, only something has been thought, ‘subjectively’ posited. Thinking which knows

<sup>182</sup>Matt. VII:8

<sup>183</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*. IX.To gain one's soul in patience;p.155

<sup>184</sup>It would be probably closer to the actual grace, which is withdrawn after the performance of the act for which it was granted, than to the sanctifying grace, which has the constant, habitual effect and makes one permanently holy, but we will leave such distinctions to the theologians.

<sup>185</sup>St. John of the Cross, *The Poems*.

<sup>186</sup>Aristotle, *Physics*. 187a.33-34

nothing but its *actual* concepts is a sad affair and it indeed can not get further than such a denial. It can not recognise that this ‘thought’ of fullness beyond emptiness is not an *objective* thought of a possible state of affairs or an *actual* agent; that thinking it as a merely possible hypothesis is to deny it and think its opposite; that this thought would not be itself without being already a *trustful* admittance, *pistis*; that it is impossible to approximate it, for in its simplicity, it can only be thought as Yes or not thought at all; that it is knowledge which, recognising presence, becomes *participation*, or simply, *participation* which recognises itself as such. But this knowledge, this *gnosis*, is not of the *actual* kind, it does not provide any *visible* justifications or reasons forcing one to accept it. If it did, the *choice* would not be a spontaneous and free event; only in the fact that it can be denied, in the complete lack of any reactive character, consists the absolute freedom of the *spiritual choice* (and then of its consequences).

70. ***Good from evil***

The silent scream “Release me!” fills the emptiness with ... *nothing*. Yet, *nothingness* ceases to threaten with hollow darkness and void and, instead, becomes the source, the (new) *origin*. *Spiritual aspects – humility, openness, thankfulness* – turn the *indistinct nothingness* into a warm and living friend, both remote and close. Of course, it is still *nothingness*, there is nobody out there, but the *indistinctness* started to live, and its life is fully consummated in the *spirit*, that is, *absolute* relation. It is like creating by mere willing, but willing at this level means close to nothing – in *actual* terms, perhaps, only surrender without resignation, *trust* without hope, *hope* without expectations... The *spiritual choice* of Yes, aiming at *nothing* and presenting *nothing*, may indeed suggest inventing something more definite, something more communicable which could be posited as the active agent responsible for everything – Nature, Fate, Zeus, God, JHVH... *Reflection* is bound to do that, and the ‘*objective images*’ nourish its natural, though only subconscious, sense of participation as the sense of dependency. But the only active agent is the *spirit*, the tension between *nothingness* of the *one* and *nothingness* of *self*, between God and God-image, between God and existence. The rest is a more or less adequate manner of speaking, perhaps, *conceptual positing*, perhaps even objectification...

We think that emptiness is when nobody speaks, so we wait for some signs, look for the sound of some words. But “silence is a fence around wisdom” and it is God’s voice. Emptiness is not when nobody speaks but when nobody listens, when we speak, scream into void. Strangely, here being listened to is simply to dare to speak, to admit that *I* can’t will into void, that *I* can’t live in the middle of emptiness. The most real is that which you can not live without, and the ontological argument conceptualises the meeting of the highest reality, of *ens realissimum, originarium, summum, entium*, of the *indistinct One*. This requires a prior Yes, the will wanting ‘Something’ to be, but ‘Something’ which is not this or that but, as a matter of fact, everything... “What you desire strongly, with all your will, you already have and this can not be taken away from you neither by God nor by any creature, if only your will is complete, wants it because of God and stands in front of Him. Let there be no “I would like”. This would only be a future. But “I want – now – and hence it is”. Truly, with my will I can everything.”<sup>187</sup>

The *choice* of Yes, raised above all *visible* reasons, is a free creation – it is needed to create the situation of *participation* from *alienation*. The *choice* of No does not have this aspect because it is motivated by the *visible* misery and *alienation* – it only accepts and surrenders to it. The alternative of these two possibilities represents the *absolute* freedom of *choice* between creation and resignation, between *participation* and *alienation*: “if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.”<sup>188</sup> The *choice* is what it creates: “He who knows the *Brahman* as non-existing becomes himself non-existing. He who knows the *Brahman* as existing him we know himself as existing.”<sup>189</sup> No creates *alienation* by giving up the possibility of finding anything and eventual *alienation* is nothing else but this No. This is only a resignation, it creates only *nihil ex nihilo*, so we won’t call it “creation”. It is Yes that creates by transcending the emptiness; it creates *concrete participation* which, in turn, is nothing but accepting the *gift* of the *origin*. In short, both Yes and No are *nexus* – of choosing, receiving, being, knowing –

<sup>187</sup>Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. B:A.I.1] This might be misconstrued as a sheer voluntarism but will which is complete, which is *concretely founded*, is not exhausted by its *actual* intention. We will return to it below in 3.2.2.

<sup>188</sup>Chr. I:28.9

<sup>189</sup>Śaṅkara [after S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, eds., *Indian Philosophy*. For our purposes, we don’t distinguish *Brahman* from *one*.]

both, of course, *founding* the opposite concrete modifications of all the aspects.

### **Without me God would not be God**

71.

As we emphasized, Yes is free creation but not creation *ex nihilo*, only of good from evil, of participation from alienation – or else of concrete God from abstract Godhead. “Without me God would not be God. I am the cause of God being God.”<sup>190</sup> Meister does not say “I am the cause of God”, only that the existence is the cause of *nothingness* being God. Indeed, without the confronting existence, the *indistinct* would remain *indistinguished indistinct*.

*Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?*

*Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)*

*Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)*

*Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,*

*mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.*

*Nach mir hast du kein Haus, darin*

*dich Worte, nah und warm, begrüssen.*

*Es fällt von deinen müden Füßen*

*die Samtsandale, die ich bin.*

*Dein grosser Mantel lässt dich los.*

*Dein Blick, den ich mit meiner Wange*

*warm, wie mit einem Pfahl, empfange,*

*wird kommen, wird mich suchen, lange –*

*und legt beim Sonnenuntergange*

*sich fremden Steinen in den Schooss.*

*Was wirst du tun, Gott? Ich bin bange.*<sup>191</sup>

Just like the alternative Yes-No offers no third possibility (“He that is not with me is against me;”<sup>192</sup>), so God is either living or dead, and he lives *only* in the human *soul*. “The soul is a heavenly housing of eternal Godhead. So that He completes His divine work only in it.”<sup>193</sup> “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.”<sup>194</sup> The *concrete participation*, this living presence of God’s in the *soul* is not a fact, an *objective truth* – it is only the possibility of Yes. Without Godhead’s *nothingness*, there would be no *me* and no world. But without *me*, without the place where Godhead can become *concrete* and where God can *incarnate*, there would be . . . no God, or else, God would have to remain one, a mere principle, perhaps, a *reflective abstraction*, ‘the first mover’ or ‘the ultimate cause’. It is said about God “I love them that love me”<sup>195</sup>, but, in fact, God’s life is *nothing else* but this *love*. The “intellectual love of the mind toward God is the love with which God loves Himself.”<sup>196</sup> If *I* deny this *love*, if *I* do not live it, then what can God do? Man’s eventual freedom is God’s helplessness. His *command* leaves *me* free, it always leaves the place for saying *No*, and if *I* say *No*, if *I* die – “What will you do, God? I am worried.”

Abstractly, the choice is between nothing and everything. Yes recognises the *indistinct* as the 72.

<sup>190</sup>Eckhart *German Sermons*, Matt.V:3. [O. Davis, ed., *Selected Writings* 22, J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., *Meister Eckhart... 52]*

<sup>191</sup>R. M. Rilke, *Das Stunden-Buch. Vom mönchischen Leben*

<sup>192</sup>Matt. XII:30; Lk. XI:23

<sup>193</sup>Eckhart «So wird die Seele eine himmlische Behausung der ewigen Gottheit. So daß er seine göttlichen Werke nun in ihr vollbringt.» According to a Mesopotamian myth from VI-th century BC., Marduk, “in order to prepare a habitation for gods in the thirst of their hearts//Created humankind.”[after R. Graves, R. Patai, *Hebrew Myths.I:2*] The theme dominates neo-Platonic anthropology with a clear expression in Eriugena, developing the quote from Maximus Confessor “For they say that man and God are paradigms of each other.” A recent return of the theme – perhaps, in its academic fashion, somehow disguised and politicised: “God is supposed to be absolutely powerful in our tradition. [...] I’m trying to think of some unconditionality that would not be sovereign, that is, to deconstruct the theological heritage of the concept, the political concept, of sovereignty, without abandoning the unconditionality of gifts, of hospitality, and so on. That means that some unconditionality might be associated not with power but with weakness, with powerlessness. [...] I’m trying to think of some divinity dissociated from power, if it is possible.” [J. Derrida, *Roundtable at the conference Religion and Postmodernism III*. [after J. Caputo, *Without sovereignty, without being....*]]

<sup>194</sup>Prov. XX:27

<sup>195</sup>Prov. VIII:17

<sup>196</sup>B. Spinoza, *Ethics.* V:Prop.XXXVI. (We must distance ourselves from Spinoza’s partition of God and summation of parts back into His totality again. The actual formulation says “...is part of the infinite love with which God...”)

origin, it distinguishes it above all visibility, and so it is. “It” may be taken to refer to the one, but primarily it refers to the existence saying Yes. It acquires being which is no longer merely *ontologically founded* in the one, but which is *concretely founded* in it, which is *participation*. As such a transition from *nothing* to ‘Something’, Yes is a new creation of the world, or what amounts to the same, a *second birth*. No sees only emptiness, does not distinguish it, and so it is not. It is *ontologically founded* in the same origin, but this *founding* remains as abstract and irrelevant as a simple fact, unavoidable truth; it does not find a *concrete* counterpart in one’s life.

There is only one God, and everything is his *sign*. ‘In itself’ He is *nothing*, that is, everything. But although the presence is obvious, it is not obvious that it is His presence, and so he has two faces: *nothingness* can be all or nothing, he can be life or death, generous giver or sower of despair, peaceful love or fearful vengeance. It is not entirely up to me to choose which face he will show – the *spiritual choice* is not my act. We will have something more to say about things I can do, but first let us make a small digression.

### 3.2.1. Ratio Anselmi

73. *Aliquid, quo maius cogitari non potest*, ‘being greater than which nothing can be thought’... The shocking content of Anselm’s argument from *Proslogion* consists in the fact that existence is demonstrated from a mere concept, that being follows from knowing. The unjustified – and unjustifiable! – transition from *esse in intellectu* to *esse in re*, raised as one of the earliest objections already by Anselm’s contemporary Gaunilon, has the same content as the ‘creation’, the *second birth* we were just speaking about.

The list of other objections of various kinds could be rather long: that ‘being’/‘existing’ is not a predicate which could be added to the concept of anything, that ‘being greater than’ remains unspecified and cannot be given meaning making the argument work, that ‘being greater than which nothing can be thought’ is not a legitimate concept and one should at least show that it is not contradictory, that what is demonstrated is only necessity of a being provided that it exists and not its existence, that...<sup>197</sup>

All the objections, with all the pretensions to formality, may be interesting and nice, but they are necessarily involved into *actual* distinctions which do not apply at the level addressed by the argument. We leave the pedantic analyses of the logical forms, merits and mistakes of this beautiful argument to those who deem such exercises worthwhile.

74. The argument intends not so much to *prove* God’s existence as to confirm it, make it more transparent. Anselm repeats Augustine’s *credo, ut intelligam* – “For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand.”<sup>198</sup> Such a search is underlined by the sense of looking for something already present, §§64.ff. If we were to accept the name “ontological”, given by Kant to the argument, it would not be because it somewhat deduces being from a concept but, on the contrary, because it finds something which already is there, which is presumed on a different, and stronger, basis than the conceptual context of the proof itself.<sup>199</sup> The argument reflects the presence of the *origin*. It does not tell, in the manner of *a posteriori* ‘proofs’, how finite understanding could reach the infinite – Anselm’s dissatisfaction with his earlier proofs

<sup>197</sup> After the well-known criticisms by Gaunilon, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, the discussion still continues. E.g., E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* p.118, footnote 35.; J. N. Findlay, *Can God’s existence be disproved?*; good review in N. Malcolm, *Anselm’s ontological arguments*. (Some of these actually do not oppose Anselm, but only his argument, and some not even that, though they discuss possible objections.)

On the other hand, one should remember the tradition using the same ‘definition’ of God but with ‘better’ instead of ‘greater’, as for instance, “nothing can be thought of better than God, and surely He, than whom there is nothing better, must without doubt be good.” [Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. III:10]. God “is thought of as something than which nothing is better or higher.” [St. Augustine, *Christian Doctrine*. I:15], “What is God? That than which nothing better can be thought” [St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*. V:7.15] ‘Greatness’ itself appears already in Seneca: “What is God? The totality that you see and the totality that you do not see. His greatness belongs to him in such a way that nothing greater can be conceived” [L. A. Seneca, *Natural questions*. I:Preface 13]. Also, though with respect to the perfection of the universe, M. T. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* II:7-8.

<sup>198</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*. 1. The subtitle given by Anselm to *Proslogion* was *Fides quaerens intellectum* – Faith in quest of understanding.

<sup>199</sup> In terms of mere conceptual inferences, we have perhaps only “presupposed an existence as belonging to the realm of the possible, and have then, on that pretext, inferred its existence from its internal possibility – which is nothing but a miserable tautology.” [I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. I:2nd Division.3.4, A597/B625.] Perhaps, in terms of mere inferences. But every valid inference is only a tautology, and all tautologies are equally miserable.

from *Monologion*, his search for an *a priori* argument can be seen as an expression of the fact that only such a structure reflects the underlying postulate that this has already happened, that understanding already is involved in the infinite.

If nothing else, then at least the constant presence of the argument since the XII-th century, shows that ‘being greater than which nothing can be thought’, or perhaps only an idea(l) thereof, is highly troublesome for the partial *ratio* with its pretensions to universality. The troublesome aspect is that knowing which coincides with being is *gnosis* and not plain *episteme*. *Episteme* can go no further than the *actual dissociations*: the “real object is one thing, and the understanding itself, by which the object is grasped, is another,”<sup>200</sup> hence: the argument would be a valid proof if the idea of God in human mind and God’s being were identical. This identity, however, is impossible for *actual* thinking – for it “being” means only ‘real object’, *external objectivity*, completely *dissociated* from the ‘human mind’, and as such the opposite of a ‘mere idea in the mind’. This form of objection does not really consider the form of the argument at all but merely points out the impossibility of proving that anything is: a proof is a thought, while thing is a being – the two, once *dissociated*, can not be the same by their very nature, ‘by definition’.

The argument has nothing to do with any thing which can be thought in the mode of such a *dissociation*. It does not apply to any *actual* things, and “if anyone should discover for me something existing either in reality or in the mind alone – *except* ‘that than which a greater cannot be thought’ – to which the logic of my argument would apply, then I shall find that Lost Island and give it, never more to be lost, to that person.”<sup>201</sup> But God who, without me, would only be impersonal Godhead, God about whom I should worry, in case I die, God who does not live somewhere else, in a deistic *dissociation* from this world and human life but, on the contrary, in its midst, who is hardly anything else than the *spiritual* tension of this life, the *absolute* pole of the *existential confrontation* – well, with such a God there is no difference between his being and being *present*, between his being alive and being alive in me (or in you), or – if one insists on the inadequate mode of expression – between his ‘being in and for and by himself’ and the ‘idea of him in my mind’.

Thinking it is not yet knowing it. For to know it (and it is possible to *actually* know it) is nothing else but to recognise this knowledge as one’s being, to recognise the relation of *confrontation* as the *participation*. Anselm’s argument appears as a recurring shibboleth of the ever recurring suspicion: that knowledge becomes being which it already has been, that the *visible* understanding, the understanding of the *visible* follows in the *invisible traces* of its *origin*. These, in turn, are only conceptual figures of the deepest possible transformation of human being, in so far as man can contribute to such a transformation, of the creation of good from evil.<sup>202</sup>

The disputes over the validity of the argument will hardly ever stop, because the possible interpretations will always not only reflect the available repository of concepts, but also mimic the assumptions, or rather the deep *motivations*, one had in advance. It is of little value to argue “[h]ow far the idea of a most perfect being, which a man may frame in his mind, does or does not prove the existence of a God [...] For in the different make of men’s tempers and application of their thoughts, some arguments prevail more on one, and some on another, for the confirmation of the same truth.”<sup>203</sup> Men may, of course, disagree not only with respect to the validity of proofs and arguments concerning ‘the same truth’ but also with respect to this truth itself. In the most

<sup>200</sup> Gaunilon of Marmoutiers, *On behalf of the fool*. 3

<sup>201</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Reply to Gaunilo*. 3

<sup>202</sup> It would be tempting to draw here yet further analogy – with the Socratic contention that virtue is knowledge. Distinct virtues form a unity (we might say, a *nexus*) in prudence or the knowledge of what is truly good; and as knowledge may, according to Plato, concern only the unchanging, the object of prudence, the true goodness is *absolute*. It would require a bit to overcome vast conceptual differences, but at least some of the basic intuitions could probably turn out to be the same. The real difference would concern the opposite pole. The simple-minded negation might suggest that, since virtue=knowledge, so evil=ignorance. But flat negations and contradictions are of little use outside formal logic – negation of *gnosis* is non-*gnosis*, and that may be ignorance as well as adequate *actual* understanding; negation of *participation* is non-*participation*, and that may be intensional evil as well as mere confusion. The resignation and surrender of the *spiritual* *No* seem to have no counterpart in the Platonic evil as mere mistake or ignorance. “Evil, be thou my good” read with Plato says something like: “I choose evil because I believe it to be good”. In our reading it is rather: “I choose evil because I am not able to choose good”, where ‘not being able’ may have the flavour of ‘not knowing better’ but also of ‘having not enough strength’ and even of ‘not willing’.

<sup>203</sup> J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. IV:10.7

abstract and extreme form, the poles of this disagreement reflect either Yes or No, and there are no visible, objective reasons allowing one to choose between them. The argument reduces really to what one wants to understand by “*aliquid, quo maius cogitari non potest*”. If one takes it to be what is intended, to be God, then one has already drawn the conclusion. For thinking God – who is, and who is Being: *id, quod est esse* – without thinking him as being (meaning *quod est*, not *esse*) is to think something else: either an empty concept, a mere word, or a non-empty concept which, by the very fact of its non-emptiness, can not be the concept of God. Without any existential import, thinking will never be able to think God. “For in one sense a thing is thought when the word signifying it is thought; in another sense when the very object which the thing is is understood. In the first sense, then, God can be thought not to exist, but not at all in the second sense. No one, indeed, understanding what God is can think that God does not exist [...]”<sup>204</sup> The argument invites, even provokes, one to realise that ‘merely thinking God’ is not thinking him at all, that thinking God properly is not an operation of mere *episteme*, a play of concepts, but requires this thinking to have existential relevance or, in a more traditional phrase, that one “lifts one’s mind to the contemplation of God”, above the actual dissociations and arguments.

### 3.2.2. Reflective Yes

77. As announced at the end of §72, we now want to say a few words about things which are in our power and which may have some influence on the *spiritual choice*. Yes is not an act, it is an event happening above the horizon of *mineness*. It is not an act because *I* do not perform it and because it is not limited to the *horizon of actuality*. It is an event in the sense that *I participate* in it, it affects not only *me* but *my* very being. *Participation* does not require even slightest reflective consciousness – it is exactly something which *transcends the actuality* of a mere ‘being a part of’ or ‘taking a part in’. *I participate* because *I am not the master*. If *I were*, *participation* would be impossible, for one does not *participate* in things and actions one controls – one executes or masters them.

But, on the other hand, one can agree (or disagree) with all that has been said above about the *choice*, one can reflectively consent or dissent, reflectively say Yes or No. As *my self* can be confused with *myself*, the transcendental ego with the empirical one, so here we have the possibility of confusing the *spiritual choice* with the *actual* one, the event with the *act*. The latter will recognise some *actual signs* of various aspects of the *spiritual choice*. A possible reflective sign of the *trust*, for instance, might be the *actual* faith that it is indeed possible to exit hell from which there is no exit, that suffering is not an evil revenge but a trial teaching me that evil can not possibly have the last word. But it might equally be the absence of any such explicit faith which, however, still does not exclude the possibility of release. This might, perhaps, look like a paradox to somebody who has not been in vicinity of *nothingness*. But who has not been in the vicinity? Yes does not require a descend to hell. Moreover, although its reality, grace, happens in the invisible depths, in the very *origin* of Being, we may attempt a reflective description of some of its *aspects*. Such *actual* expressions will constitute elements of the *reflective act* of the choice of Yes, of the act, or rather variety of acts, which it is in our power to perform and which may influence the *invisible choice*.

The *choice* of Yes means to recognise *nothingness* as the *one*, the ultimate *invisibility* as the *origin*. In such a recognition, *I* admit several things.

78. **Humility.**

Firstly, reflecting the insufficiency not only of *my actual* but even the *spiritual choice*, §67, *I* admit that *I am not the master*. The *distinctions* among which *I* live, and some of which *I* actually can control, originate beyond the sphere of *visibility*. My understanding is limited to this latter sphere, but it does not embrace it, and it can only vaguely, and hardly intensionally, reflect the workings of *invisibles*. *I understand myself* when *I* understand *my limits*, but the very fundamental issue is first to recognise that such limits at all exist, that *I* end where *this world* ends, and that beyond there is something which, from the perspective of *this world* is but *nothingness*. That *I am not the master* is to say that there is something more than *I* and *this world*, that the *nothingness* beyond it is not emptiness, is not lack of reality but, on the contrary, is the most real source of whatever is encountered in *this world*. Eckhart asks “When does one

<sup>204</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*. 4

stay humble? I answer: When you apprehend One separated from others. And when does one step beyond humility? I answer: When one apprehends everything in everything, then one steps beyond humility.”<sup>205</sup>

The limits which are not to be overstepped are not any *visible* lines stretched around by some authoritarian ruler. They are limits of *visibility* as such, the *invisible* limits which are impossible to overstep anyway, and *humility* is simply an accepting recognition of this fact. “Humility is that whereby we refrain from the desire for empty glory, so that we don’t desire to seem more than we are.”<sup>206</sup> *Humility* does not mean that *I* recognise any particular master who is governing *me* or *this world*. *Humility* in this *spiritual* form is not a submission to any definite power. Even more, it excludes such a power or, to the extent it experiences it, it transcends it. Encounter with any awe inspiring, ineffably powerful *tremendum sacrum* may easily lead to humiliation rather than to *humility*. Humility which is a reaction to anything specific, which is caused by no matter how *vague*, but still a particular cause or power, is perhaps an emotion, “the sorrow produced by contemplating our impotence or helplessness,”<sup>207</sup> but it is not a true, *spiritual humility*. This latter is *humility* in the face of *nothingness*, one does not submit to anything, yet one *submits* – only that makes it truly *spiritual* submission. “Let me be humble, that is, one who thirsts for the origin.”<sup>208</sup>

### ***Thankfulness.***

79.

*Humility* faces the ultimate *gift* and amounts simply to its acceptance. Only “the miser always fears presents.”<sup>209</sup> In this acceptance, *I* admit that *the world* in which *I* live, the field of *visible distinctions* is given to *me*, is the result of a process which might have involved *my self* but certainly not *myself*. The world, just like *grace*, is a generous – because unmerited – *gift*. This does not mean that no single thing in *this world* is a result of *my activity*, only that, eventually, all such things are grounded in the *transcendent* sphere of *invisibility*. *The world* is a *gift*, *my life* is a *gift* and everything that *I* ever encounter is a *gift*. *I am* while there is no sufficient reason for *me* being here. *I am* while *I* might not be. Recognition of *the world* and *my life* as a *gift* of *transcendence* amounts to *thankfulness*.

It is essential for *spiritual thankfulness* that we recognise the *gift* as arbitrary, as having no sufficient reason – *creation* is a mystery. The recognition of the *one* as the generous source admits only that it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Any search for sufficient reasons, any attempt to explain the necessity of this *gift* amounts to explaining it away and to renouncing the attitude of *thankfulness*. The arbitrariness of the *gift* is what *founds* the *spiritual thankfulness*. Its *spiritual* character means just that it is not thankfulness for anything specific; it is *thankfulness* for *nothing*, that is, for everything. If only *I* start looking for reasons for being thankful, for any positive things worth gratitude, *I* renounce the *spiritual* dimension of *thankfulness*. (Which, of course, does not mean that *I* necessarily oppose it.)

### ***Openness.***

80.

The arbitrariness of this *gift* means that it might have not taken place or else that it might have been entirely different. Instead of ‘this’ *I* might have gotten ‘that’, instead of being ‘this’ *I* might have been ‘that’. No matter what, in more precise, *visible* terms, *I* have obtained, does not change the nature of the *gift* and deserves the same *thankfulness*. Anything that *I am* or encounter is but a particular instance of the fundamental generosity. This unreserved *thankfulness*, the unreserved acceptance of the *gift*, amounts to *openness*.

It reflects the presence which was suggested in §64, the presence which already permeates the whole world, which can be found in every place, “whether in a pigsty or in a palace”. Consequently, it is not *openness* to this or that, to anything specific; in particular, it is not ‘identification’ with *my things*, *my pleasures*, *my friends*. It is unreserved, unrestricted acceptance, *spiritual openness* to *nothing*, that is, to everything.

### ***Love***

81.

These three aspects – *humility*, *thankfulness* and *openness* – we call jointly “*love*” or, to avoid

<sup>205</sup> Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. A:IV.II.4.1.b)]

<sup>206</sup> P. Abelard, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*. II:(291)

<sup>207</sup> B. Spinoza, *Ethics*. III.On the origin and nature of the emotions:Definitions of the emotions:26

<sup>208</sup> Z. Herbert, *The prayer of the traveling Mr. Cogito*.

<sup>209</sup> A poem from the Eddas [after M. Mauss, *The Gift*. Introduction]

confusion, the “spiritual love”.<sup>210</sup> Love does not ‘consist of’ *humility*, *thankfulness* and *openness*; it is the unified and *indistinct* attitude and these are but aspects of the same *nexus* of Yes.<sup>211</sup> Other aspects might be listed, but it should not be necessary to exaggerate elaborations. For instance, *openness* amounts to *trust* as much as to *hope*, while *humble thankfulness* to *fidelity*. *Love* is the aspect of *grace*, the first element founded concretely in the *spiritual* Yes. Or put differently, *love* is *grace* in so far as it has *visible manifestations*, eventually even as it becomes *actually reflected*.

### 3.2.2.i. Works

82. The difference between the *spiritual* and *reflective* Yes concerns not so much the contents, as the place they occupy in the field of existence. If a *nexus* founds particular forms of understanding or *acts*, then achieving such a form of understanding or performing such *acts* will contribute to formation or strengthening of this very *nexus*. *Grace* of the *spiritual* Yes is the relation of Being in the heart of *existence*, it embraces its whole being to its very depth, without leaving anything outside. At the same time, it may remain almost indifferent with respect to *actual* situations and moods – indifferent, that is, unnoticed if one tries to capture it by the *actual* look. The contents of the *reflective* Yes, on the other hand, occupy *actuality* without, necessarily, witnessing to the presence of their *spiritual* counterparts. *I* can think as long as *I* wish about *humility* and *thankfulness*, without ever becoming *humble* and *thankful*. *I* can even perform a lot of *humble acts* which, however, do not make me *humble* (especially, if *humility* is my intention.)

A closer relation between the two levels obtains when the *reflective* choice is made genuinely, that is, *actually* tries to reflect the aspects like those listed above in its own attitude, when it does not deliberate *thankfulness*, but tries to find it, does not ask about *humility*, but tries to live it. The *actual* choice is not even a necessary condition for the *spiritual* event of Yes, but it is certainly helpful, especially for *reflection* which has already been involved into the game of *invisibles* and which is in a sore need of *clarifying* it. Eventually, the *spiritual* choice says only Yes to *nothingness*, and so does the *reflective* one. But “[i]t requires an eminent reflection, or rather a great faith, to sustain a reflection on nothing, which is to say infinite reflection.”<sup>212</sup>

Works and even particular *acts* – the elements of *reflective* attitude – do contribute to the *invisible* sphere, and when performed in a right attitude can contribute to Yes. The general mechanism of such an influence is the same as described in II:2.3 – although the *actual* experiences, feelings, thoughts, *acts* do not influence directly the sphere of *invisibles*, yet they accumulate and pass gradually into the *virtual* depths in the soul. It is not so that “in every good work the just man sins”, that “every work they attempt is accursed”<sup>213</sup>, for good works accumulate and strengthen the goodness of the soul. But there are no obvious, causal or otherwise, connections, no guarantees nor any precise rules determining the *virtual* effects of the *actual* works. Also, all *actual* elements are surrounded by the uncontrollable rest which, too, adds up to the result. The descriptions remain forever partial... Fortunately, “the gods have a care of anyone whose desire is to become just and to be like God, as far as man can attain to the divine likeness by the pursuit of virtue.”<sup>214</sup> “As far as man can...” because actually attaining to this likeness, the *spiritual choice* of Yes, is an *invisible* event. Its dependency on the *visible* sphere may be claimed but never observed, may be concluded but never proved. A *spiritual* event, when it comes, comes only and unmistakably as a *gift*.

83. “The faith of man follows his nature. Man is made of faith: as his faith is so he is.”<sup>215</sup> As above, so below, and we have followed this direction almost all the time. And yet, “[n]ot by refraining from action does man attain freedom from action. Not by mere renunciation does he attain supreme perfection. For not even for a moment can a man be without action. [...] For there is no man

<sup>210</sup>“Charity” or, since we relay mostly on the Christian tradition, “*agape*”, or even “obedience”, in the sense used by the Church Fathers and mystics, may be here equally good – in fact, synonymous! – words.

<sup>211</sup>According to Pseudo-Dionysius, the first, closest to Godhead sphere of the celestial hierarchy comprises three kinds of Angles: The Seraphim – the fiery, purifying, inspiring source, The Cherubim – the illuminating light, and The Thrones – the perfecting and receptive openness.

<sup>212</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*. I:B [56]

<sup>213</sup>J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. III:19.2.4

<sup>214</sup>Plato, *Republic*. 613a:7.b.1 [Copleston I; p.218]

<sup>215</sup>*The Bhagavad-Gita*. XVII:3

on earth who can fully renounce living work, but he who renounces the reward of his work is in truth a man of renunciation.”<sup>216</sup> The work done with thankful acceptance of any, possibly even none reward, with humble renunciation of one’s pretensions to ownership and authorship, with exclusive attention to its own standards – such work marks the path on which “[n]o step is lost.”<sup>217</sup> Complete dedication means that the work, needed for my life as it may be, is actually a sacrifice, an expression of self-surrender. “Offer all thy works to God, throw off selfish bonds, and do thy work. [...] This man of harmony surrenders the reward of his work and thus attains final peace: the man of disharmony, urged by desire, is attached to his reward and remains in bondage.”<sup>218</sup> This bondage of attachment may, too, have the appearance of intense and dedicated work. But such an inverted form announces not a peaceful self-renunciation but self-annihilating and all-consuming insatiability. On the other hand, “[t]he man who in his work finds silence, and who sees that silence is work, this man in truth sees the Light and in all his works finds peace. [...] In whatever work he does such a man in truth has peace: he expects nothing, he relies on nothing, and ever has fullness of joy. [...] He is glad with whatever God gives him, and he has risen beyond the two contraries here below; he is without jealousy, and in success or in failure he is one: his works bind him not.”<sup>219</sup> Silence, after all, is the voice of God, but to hear it, above noises, is the end and not the beginning.

Pure work is *both* an expression of Yes *and* the means of approaching it. “Seekers of union, 84. ever striving, see him dwelling in their own hearts; but those who are not pure and have not wisdom, though they strive, never see him.”<sup>220</sup> Like many apparently vicious circles, so this mutual dependence, underlying all the disputes about the primacy of faith over works or works over faith, is but a trace of a *nexus* – here, the *nexus* of Yes. Nothing is first; the fact that we can decide and attempt only what is *actually* in our power, does not make the works either superior nor inferior to the faith. “Faith without works is empty, works without faith are blind.”<sup>221</sup> Both follow the same course and neither is possible without the other. Works contribute to faith and faith can not fail to manifest itself in works.

If only we do not try to reduce goodness to any utility, usefulness or other *visible* categories, we can say: the works of a good man are good and only such works are good.<sup>222</sup> We would certainly not speak about the necessity or indispensability of works; indeed, “Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.”<sup>223</sup> Yet, we would object to denying works any helpful function.<sup>224</sup> Thus:

1. Works are not indispensable but are helpful.
2. They are the only things which *I* can intend and, to some extent, control, with respect to my *spiritual* destiny.
3. They are thus the only *visible* means – and hence the *only* means – of striving for the *unity*, of keeping heaven and earth together.

Their *spiritual* relevance is determined not only by their content but primarily by their *rest*. Those bringing *me* closer to Yes:

4. are dedicated to God, are only a *visible* expression of the *spiritual* self-renunciation,
5. are not *mine* and are not performed for any reward.

---

<sup>216</sup>Ibid. III:4-5/XVIII:11

<sup>217</sup>Ibid. II:40

<sup>218</sup>Ibid. V:10/12

<sup>219</sup>Ibid. IV:18/20/22

<sup>220</sup>Ibid. XV:11

<sup>221</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. I:2.Introduction.1, A51/B75

<sup>222</sup>“The ground upon which good character rests is the very same ground from which man’s work derives its value, namely a mind wholly turned to God. Verily, if you were so minded, you might tread on a stone and it would be a more pious work than if you, simply for your own profit, where to receive the Body of the Lord and were wanting in spiritual detachment.” Eckhart [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*.XI]

<sup>223</sup>Amos IX:2

<sup>224</sup>The objections against such a possibility of ‘influencing God’s will’ do not concern us. It is clear that *indistinct* is not affected by anything happening within the world, among the *distinctions*. God’s ‘will’ (if one wants to insist on such a language) remains unchangeable: *actuality* remains *ontological founded* in the *one* and anybody willing to return is invited to and promised the possibility. But God’s appearance changes and it changes exactly according to *my life*. It is *I* who live Yes or No. Works help me to do the one or the other and they are *the only* way in which *I* can possibly help *myself*. But they are also *only* help: the eventual result is not in my power.

In section 3.3 below we will consider *concrete founding* effected by Yes. In this connection, we will see several specific examples of attitudes *founded* by Yes which provide thus also examples of attitudes strengthening the *invisible* currents leading to Yes.

### 3.2.2.ii. Projections?

85. One could perhaps ask the natural question which appeared briefly in §69. Does not *spiritual choice* amount to a projection? Do we not say that the *indistinct* and unknowable *one* has to be endowed with the qualities of the source, goodness, power and what not? The answer is no, and if you see this, you may safely skip this section.

Indeed, there “can be no greater incongruity than [for a disciple of Spencer] to proclaim with one breath that the substance of things is unknowable, and with the next that the thought of it should inspire us with awe, reverence, and a willingness to add our co-operative push in the direction toward which its manifestations seem to be drifting.”<sup>225</sup> There might be an incongruity in suggesting that the ‘unknowable’ should inspire one to anything. But we have neither anything ‘unknowable’ nor call for any inspiration by something. The *indistinct* is unknowable only if knowledge means the *actual episteme*, knowledge of ‘whats’. But we do have full knowledge of it, we know all that is to know about it, if not in this narrow sense, then in the sense of *gnosis* – it is *indistinct*, *one above distinctions*. As to the inspiration then, indeed, it is only to silence. But silence can be a calm voice of eternity or a mute emptiness. It does not inspire: it leaves you completely free to make your choice. This choice, the *spiritual choice* is a thoroughly real choice between the only two alternatives offered – not by the ‘unknowable’ but by the *absolute* which, in its *indistinctness*, remains indeed indifferent. Only we are affected, and we are affected by confronting the face of *one* which corresponds to our *choice*. What we have done with, or rather *out of* the concept of *indistinct* in Book I, can be taken as a mere illustration of the grounds which might incline one towards seeing it as a true *origin*, towards accepting it as truth, that is, towards saying Yes. There is, however, no necessity, no sufficient reasons which might force one to make this, rather than the opposite choice. If there were any, then it would not be any choice.

86. We should carefully distinguish the *choice* from mere psychological effects. According to James, “to find religion is only one out of many ways of reaching unity [...] In judging of the religious types of regeneration [...] it is important to recognise that they are only one species of a genus that contains other types as well. For example, the new birth may be away from religion into incredulity; or it may be from moral scrupulosity into freedom and license; or it may be produced by the irruption into the individual’s life of some new stimulus or passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, revenge, or patriotic devotion. In all these instances we have precisely *the same psychological form* of event, – a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency.”<sup>226</sup>

One can form hierarchies of genera and species as one finds appropriate but if these have ‘the same psychological form’ (which here probably means something like psychologically indistinguishable, even if contentually different), then thank you very much for the psychological contribution – *pneuma* is *above psyche* and here our ways part definitely with psychology. Indeed, having only *actual experiences* of a ‘subjective’ psyche as the basis of distinctions, all such states may happen to end up in the same sack. Yet, even James does not include these later instances in his treatment of the religious experience. So, after all, they are distinguishable? The sense of purpose, of direction and goal, of mission, or else of finding a valuable sphere of experience may indeed, especially if taken as absolute, give firmness and stability. All *idols* can, and many minor matters can. *Idols* are seldom entirely false – they gain followers exactly because they contain an element of truth. But the *unity founded* by the *spiritual choice* is not derived from any sense of goal, direction or mission – the goal is *nothing*, the direction is ‘anywhere’, and the mission is “love, and do what you wilt.”<sup>227</sup>

One can manifest itself in innumerable ways which may be psychologically as different as trembling and adoration, as fear and attraction. These differences can often be found behind different visible characters of various religions.

<sup>225</sup> W. James, *Essays in Pragmatism*. I; p.19

<sup>226</sup> W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. VIII

<sup>227</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*. VII:8

An experience of God's presence will almost inevitably have tremendous influence on one's life, and the form of this influence may depend heavily on the character of the experience. But it is not its character, its content which may account for its influence – it is the lack thereof, expressed as the tremendous force, *majestas*. Psychologically distinguishable content plays its part but what is constitutive for such an experience is what this content reveals – the ultimate, absolute force which groans into one's face without showing its own. It is the *intensity* of such an experience, its irresistible power, which is its essential content, not the form under which this content appears. And this power is *objectless* and *contentless*, it has no agent, it is the power of *nothingness*, but it is. There is, consequently, nothing to be projected, there is only something to be recognised – in the most mundane sense, *that I am not the master*.

*Spiritual choice* is not a matter of *any experience* just like religiosity is never reducible to *any experiences* which, perhaps (though even this 'perhaps' seems too much), may be psychologically indistinguishable from a sudden attack of fear on a neurotic (or even a healthy) person, or from a sense of ecstatic joy which recurrently visits an infantile or senile one. It happens in a meeting with the *absolute nothingness* which involves *full and active participation* of the invaded. *Spiritual choice* can take place long after the actual experience and also when no such experience ever found place.

A meeting with *absolute 'objectivity'* does not require any specific context or experience, even if specific experiences play usually (psychologically) some role of motivating factors. Such experiences are possible *actualisations*, as Otto says, 'schematisations' of the *a priori* ground of all *experience*. To the extent the presence of *numinosum* is recognised *beyond* their content, they themselves are *a priori* – irreducible to any *visible experiences* or categories, concepts or feelings, but grounded in the ultimate *invisibility*.

The fact that *absolute* may (in fact, always does) invade only one person and not another is such an argument for its '*subjectivity*' as it would be against the objectivity of Japan that some people were there while others were not. That it is unverifiable? What is? It is as unverifiable as the accusation of its being a '*subjective projection*' is self-*confirming*. For as long as one insists on such a characterisation, one is simply unable to get any meaning whatsoever of its nature and value. But "*a priori* recognitions are not the ones which everybody has but ones which everybody *may have*."<sup>228</sup>

Simply: whatever enters and meets you in any situation, comes from beyond the horizon – not only the *horizon of actuality* but, eventually, the horizon of distinguishability. Certainly, many things are expected and predictable but they, too, enter not on your command but on their own – you can at best help them, never force them. And they, too, eventually emerge from beyond the horizon of the distinguished contents, from the *indistinct*. *Reflective Yes* is hardly much more than that, than the admission *that you are not the master*, that *indistinct* is and remains *indistinct*, albeit, remaining so is also the source of *distinctions*. In particular, it is exactly the attitude of *not projecting anything* beyond the horizon of distinguishability, but merely admitting its constant presence. It is, on the contrary, any other attitude which amounts to a projection: either projection of emptiness, as in the case of definite *No*, or a projection of some *idol*, as for instance the *idol of actuality* in the case of *objectivistic illusion*. *Yes* admits only that, in the face of *nothingness*, any requirement or expectation of something specific, of something *visible* is *idolatry* grown from angst. "The soul or mind reaching towards the formless finds itself incompetent to grasp where nothing bounds it or to take impression where the impinging reality is diffuse; in sheer dread of holding to nothingness, it slips away. The state is painful; often it seeks relief by retreating from all this vagueness to the region of sense, there to rest on solid ground, just as the sight distressed by the minute rests with the pleasure on the bold."<sup>229</sup>

*Spiritual choice* is not a choice of love, of morality, of charity, of unselfishness, or whatever. It does not aim at any such nor any other thing. It is the pure and bare *Yes* (or *No*). It does not choose any specific content which it might try (or has wished) to project 'outside' of its '*subjectivity*'. *Yes* chooses only silence, the *confrontation* with *nothingness* (and *No* exchanges this *confrontation* into words, concepts and, eventually, emptiness). "If the mind reels before something thus alien to all we know, we must take our stand on the things of this realm and strive thence to see. But, in the looking, beware of throwing outward; this Principle does not

<sup>228</sup>R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. XXII ("Recognition" translates here the word "*Erkenntnis*"; my emph.)

<sup>229</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:9.3

lie away somewhere leaving the rest void; to those of power to reach, it is present; to the inapt, absent.”<sup>230</sup> It is ‘throwing outward’ which amounts to projections, to either emptying *nothingness* and reducing it to a void, or else to populating it with finite *idols*. As it happens, the choice of Yes has tremendous consequences, but these are consequences, not projections.

89. Both wheat and chaff, both Yes and No tendencies “grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”<sup>231</sup> Unlike any choice based on some definite, particular *experiences*, on thoughts or feelings, the *spiritual choice* is *absolute*, not relative to any particular being or region of Being. Now, every choice can be made to suspend the relevance of subsequent feelings and thoughts; as an act of *my will* it may simply say: “I choose this, no matter what might come”. However, any choice related to particular aspects of experience, any choice motivated by and based on such particulars, will also continue being involved in them. Eventually, changes in their configuration may render sticking to the original choice the matter of pure dogmatism, inflexibility, stubbornness. Every choice is a projection, a projection of its *actual* decision into the future, every *act* and *action* is a projection – as Heidegger would say, a “project” – saying “I want this thing to become *so*”.

The reflective aspect of the *spiritual choice* is an act, and thus, in a somewhat similar way, it too externalises its content. But this externalisation does not result in any particular *object*, in any *dissociated entity*, nor in any quality ascribed to something which, subsequently, might turn out not to possess it. It is the *act* of the recognition of ultimate *transcendence*, say, the ultimate ‘objectivity’, which is not dependent on the form or quality of any possible and *actual experiences*. Through this *act reflection* only admits this *presence* and, by the same token, the insufficiency of its own modus. It recovers the constant, underlying all *experiences presence*, which *reflection* always knows, if only dimly, through *self-awareness*, that is, awareness of the *transcendence*. The *truth* of this *act*, the conformance to the *origin*, is thus recognised as lifted above and lasting beyond and independently from *this world*. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”<sup>232</sup>

90. The *spiritual choice* of Yes does not require any feelings or impressions, does not involve any specific thoughts or contents which might be projected. It is a response to the *command* of *nothingness* to become *self*, *reflection* of the *origin*. It leaves all feelings and thoughts, all *visible signs* and particulars *below*, centering around the essentially *invisible*, the *origin* which now becomes also the axis of one’s world. “The person is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish.”<sup>233</sup>

This choice is *absolute* also in the sense that it effects the final division, the definite separation of “wheat from chaff” which until now have been mixed together. It takes the spell of *closedness* from *this world* and *opens* it to the *inspiration* from *another*. But this happens only through the *absolute renunciation* of *this world* – any pretensions on its part to *absolute validity* and importance, to the ultimate and all-determining ‘objectivity’ are removed.

The *absolute character* of the *choice* amounts, in short, to the lack of any particular contents which possibly could be projected. Responding to the *command* to renounce *oneself*, it is the choice of the attitude which transforms the world: not in any of its temporal and *visible* aspects, but in its *absolute foundation* – it transforms the character of the whole *existence*. If somebody wants to call this “projection”, it is of course his choice, although such a choice amounts to much more than it believes to be doing.

### 3.3 Concrete founding

91. In Book I, we had only to do with ontological *founding*: there would be no *experiences* without *experience*, there would be no *experience* without the *chaos of distinctions*, and there would be

<sup>230</sup>Ibid. VI:9.7

<sup>231</sup>Matt. XIII:30; Lk. III:17

<sup>232</sup>Matt. VII:24-25/Lk. VI:47-48

<sup>233</sup>*The Gospel of Thomas.* 8

no *distinctions* without something to *distinguish*, or as it may be, to *distinguish* from. In Book II we saw, in a reverse order, its ‘epistemological’ counterpart: from the *immediacy of reflection* to the *actually reflected experiences*, from *experiences* to the *experience* and to the *awareness* of its *invisible* background, from *chaos* to the underlying *non-actuality* of *invisibles* and, eventually, to the *existential confrontation* with the *indistinct one*. The two hierarchies are, in fact, the same and differ only by the emphasis one puts either on the element of *participation* or relation, being or knowing; the difference of emphasis which is possible when viewing the same hierarchy either, so to speak, ‘bottom up’, from the assumed primacy of the *dissociation* into *subject* and *object*, or else ‘top down’, in the order of *founding*.

This *founding* is, as abstract ontology or epistemology in general, perhaps curiously interesting but existentially, at best only helpful and, at worst, irrelevant – it happens and works according to its structure, no matter what we do, and even if its understanding may reward my curiosity, it does not really affect me. We have several times observed that events at different levels may happen relatively independently from those at other levels because, in *concrete terms*, the ontological *founding* is not effective. It merely gives a general form and character to each level, which form and character affect the events at the respective level. But events of one level remain related to this level merely as ‘matter’ to ‘form’, and they remain almost completely unrelated to the events of other levels. Eventually, they lack anchoring in their *origin*, they lack *concrete foundation*. Thus, although the hierarchy does proceed from the *unity* of the *one*, it is not experienced as such in *concrete terms*. In particular, *reflective acts* remain *dissociated* from their *origin* which, in *actual terms*, means from each other. The intimations of *unity*, clearly known as they may be at the deeper layers of ‘knowing’, slip immediately out of *precise reflective grasp* and dissolve in *vagueness*.

If *X founds Y* then *Y participates* in *X*: both these ‘relations’ (which are one and the same) may also have, in addition to the universal and ontological form, the *concrete* one. *Concrete foundation* does not *found* experience in general, but a particular way of experiencing, a *concrete* experience that the particular things and *distinctions* of the lower levels, originate from those at the higher levels. *Concreteness* is not, as the common confusion and language usage suggest, *immediate precision*. The table in front of me, the more precisely it is perceived and identified, becomes only the more abstract, because, the more *dissociated*. *Concreteness* is the experiential continuity between the contents of *actual experiences* and their *foundation*, eventually, their *origin*. *Concrete* is only that which carries the *traces* of anchoring in the ultimate personal site, and the lack of such *traces* amounts to abstractness, that is, indifference.

Unlike the ontological *founding*, the *concrete* one is not something that simply ‘is that way’, that simply is granted by the hidden but universal order of things which one must only discover and accept. Without *Yes*, without one’s *love*, it actually is not... I can find gaiety, joy, fun in small things of *this world*, but unless this fun *participates concretely* in the higher mirth, and the mirth is surrounded by happiness of my whole *soul*, and by tranquility of the *spirit*, the fun can become only an escape towards *more fun*. “Fun I love but too much Fun is of all things the most loathsome. Mirth is better than Fun & Happiness is better than Mirth – I feel that a Man may be happy in This World.”<sup>234</sup>

The ‘happiness in This World’, however, as even the ascending levels in Blake’s description might suggest, is only a reflection of being *clearly anchored* in the *other world*. Man is a borderline between what is *below* and what is *above*, and *visible* is just another side of the *invisible*. Any attitude towards the *one* is, at the same time, an attitude towards the *other*. The *spiritual Yes* to the *invisible nothingness*, accepting everything, *founds* also some *actual* attitude in the *visible world*. Just like “holiness is never the mere *numinosum*, even at its highest level, but is something which is always in a perfect way permeated and saturated with rational, purposeful, personal and ethical elements,”<sup>235</sup> so *actuality* is not merely the site of closed, *dissociated immanence*, but the eventual *sign* of the *origin*, the meeting point of *traces* of the *invisibles*, the eventual place of *incarnation*. When the *actuality* is *reflection* of nothing less but the *origin*, when the *traces* reach all the way to the *origin*, in short, when the *visible* and *invisible* spheres are no longer *dissociated*, the just quoted words of Blake seem only to echo, in the reversed order, those of Plotinus: “The loveliness that is in the sense-realm is an index of the nobleness of the Intellectual

<sup>234</sup> W. Blake, *Letter to Rev. Dr. Trusler*.

<sup>235</sup> R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. XV

sphere, displaying its power and its goodness alike: and all things are for ever linked.”<sup>236</sup>

The attitude towards the *visible world* which is an expression of the *spiritual love* is *non-attachment*. This name, however, requires some closer remarks.

### 3.3.1. Non-attachment

“Put not with God other gods, or thou wilt sit despised and forsaken.

Thy Lord has decree that ye shall not serve other than Him”<sup>237</sup>

*Thirsting* for eternity, we flirt with time, but the moods of silence are never satisfied by anything *visible*. The *thirst* is not for anything particular, anything *visible*. This does not mean that to quench it, one has to deny all the *visible world*, that only death is the ultimate peace. This means only that *this world* itself is not enough, that it does not ‘fill the soul’, that since it contains all and only answers, it never gives *the answer* . . . To quench the *thirst*? “But how is this to be accomplished?

Cut away everything.”<sup>238</sup>

### Renouncement

92. Mystics and sages have always spoken about self-denial and denial of *this world*. In a sense, *grace*, living and lived *spiritual love*, the union of which mystics speak – lifted above *this world*, seem to be exactly such a denial.

However, the renunciation (not the denial) is only a possible part of *spiritual exercises* leading to Yes and, as the means, should not be confused with the goal. They at the same time speak always about the need for constant alertness, presence of mind, active attention to the *actual* situation. This constant vigilance may seem to contradict the supposed peace of the union with God based on absolute self-denial. There is, however, no contradiction because, as a matter of fact, the *grace* is but the *second birth*, is ‘re-birth’ not only of soul but of flesh, is resurrection of the body, that is, of *this world* as much as the *other one*. The union with God is also the union with the world. The difference is that before, *this world* was only ontologically grounded in the *other world* and thus there was not a real, concrete unity of the two. Resurrection is the *spiritual* event which brings the two worlds together, which makes *visible* not only a mere *actualisation*, but a true *manifestation* of the *invisible*, making everything “on earth, as it is in heaven”. “The strongest and deepest reality is where everything is included in the activity, the complete man without any reserve and the all-embracing God, the unitary self and the unlimited thou.”<sup>239</sup>

93. The ‘death to *this world*’ means only that *visibility* loses its absolute importance, that it is seen now in *non-attachment sub specie aeternitas*, with, as St. Francois de Sales called it, holy indifference. *I remain myself as I* have always been, but this *mineness* is no longer the axis of the world. Indeed, it is now seen and experienced only as an accident of the *origin*, as only the *actual*, only one of its possible *gifts*. “[A] man should so stand free, being quit of himself, that is, of his I, and Me, and Self, and Mine, and the like, that in all things, he should no more seek or regard himself, than if he did not exist, and should take as little account of himself as if he were not, and another had done all his works. Likewise he should count all the creatures for nothing.”<sup>240</sup>

This, indeed, is the *reflective attitude* conditioning *spiritual love*. But all this “counting for nothing” expresses only *non-attachment* to the *visible* things, the acceptance that, in their *actual* existence, they should not make *me* unconditionally dependent on them. It is not denial of their existence, nor of their possible relevance; it is only denial of their *absolute* power. “Fear not the flesh nor love it. If you fear it, it will gain mastery over you. If you love it, it will swallow and paralyze you.”<sup>241</sup> *I* still live among and act on things of *this world*, but *my life* is not exhausted by such *actions*, *I* try to attain *visible* goals, but *I* do not crave them, *I* can enjoy them, but *I* do not worship them. And if *I* fail, if *I* do not attain them, if *I* do not enjoy them, then . . . it

<sup>236</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. IV:8:6. (We would, of course, substitute for “sense-realm” and “Intellectual sphere” our expressions. And then we would even stop distinguishing the lower and higher spheres, for the ‘loveliness’ is one and the same, below as above, even if it may have different forms of expression.)

<sup>237</sup>Koran, XVII/22-23

<sup>238</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:3:17

<sup>239</sup>M. Buber, *I and You*. III. «Die stärkste und tiefste Wirklichkeit ist, wo alles ins Wirken eingeht, der ganze Mensch ohne Rückhalt und der allumfassende Gott, das geeinte Ich und das schrankenlose Du.»

<sup>240</sup>*Theologia Germanica*. XV

<sup>241</sup>*The Gospel of Philip*.

does not matter. *My life* is never exhausted by them, it always carries the *rest*, the inexhaustible potential. This rest contains *thankfulness* even for *my* failures. For all these actions, attainments and enjoyments were themselves only *visible* things of only relative value. *I* can try again or *I* can let it go – *I* do not know what *I* will do, this will turn out in the proper time and *I* may be vastly surprised. Everything is a *gift* and *I* can not have anything which *I* am not prepared to lose.<sup>242</sup>

## Idols

“Do not strive to seek after the true, only cease to cherish opinions,”<sup>243</sup> after all, “[h]uman opinions 94. are children’s toys.”<sup>244</sup> *Idols* are not *visible* things, but *visible* things considered as all important, which eventually means raised to the level of absolutes. *Idolatry*, ‘worshiping images’ is exactly that – to take as *absolutely* important something that is not.<sup>245</sup> ‘Cherishing opinions’ may be so much, and may be nourished by so many mechanisms. (‘Being entitled’, often ‘entitled to one’s own opinion’, and even ‘entitled to be heard’ are quite common forms.) At the bottom it is to make an *idol* of *mineness*, is to think that something *visible* is worth cherishing an opinion about, and that *I* am entitled to cherishing such an opinion. Cherishing an opinion, *I* cherish *myself*.

Again, all this does not mean that *I* can not mean anything about anything. I not only can – I am bound to. I will have opinions about things, *I* will participate in arrangements of things, in research, in work, in all kinds of activities of *this world*. Moreover, I will accept all these things as *my* part, as relative, yet *absolutely* real, though not as *absolute* reality. But in the moment *I* start cherishing them, *I* become attached, that is, *I* start to worship *idols*.

*Idols* are what can ‘possess’ man, ‘being possessed’ consisting precisely in making the relative into 95. the ‘absolute’. Even if I have and clearly see all the good reasons for adhering unreservedly to a given opinion, my being possessed by it consists in the *unreservedness*, in the perhaps unintended, but therefore the stronger and more effective, turning it into an ‘absolute’.

Rationalism, defined as acceptance of *actual* statement or position with the recognition of its limited validity (and in the best case, also of its actual limits), is the opposite of being possessed. In this respect, it coincides with innocence which is just that – being pure, that is, not being possessed. But every ‘-ism’ indicates being possessed, ‘absolutisation’ of some relative sphere or expression. One’s intense and deeply convinced materialism or idealism, atheism or theism, liberalism or dogmatism, Protestantism or Catholicism, intellectualism, existentialism or what not, testifies against one’s innocence. One can become possessed even by rationalism itself which, *unfounded* and *dissociated* in its *proud* complacency, tends towards agnosticism, relativism, scepticism or just dry rigidity.

## Obedience

Giving up *idols* does not mean merely to replace the ‘object’ of such a worship, to exchange the relative for the absolute, but still retain one’s attitude. *What* is being worshiped determines the *visible* aspects of the attitude. Worship of patriotism *is* different from worship of communism, worship of scientism *is* different from worship of money. Yet, they are the same in so far as *idolatry* is concerned. To cease worshiping *idols* is to recognise their thoroughly relative character, relative not only to each other and to particular circumstances, but also to the *foundation* from which they emerge; eventually, it is simply to recognise the *absolute* character of the *one* which is unconditionally *above* the world of *distinctions*. Giving up *idols* is, at bottom, giving up *oneself*, for *attachment* is the pattern of all *idolatry* and all *idols* are things which, being *below me*, possess *me*.

“Behold, in such a man must all thought of Self, all self-seeking, self-will, and what cometh thereof, be utterly lost and surrendered and given over to God, except in so far as they are

<sup>242</sup>A closely related thought of Schopenhauer dismisses the possibility of any complains: justice is equally given to all, both happy and unhappy ones.

<sup>243</sup>Anonymous Zen master

<sup>244</sup>Heraclitus DK 22B70. A related advice of Heraclitus is: “Let us not conjecture randomly about the most important things.” DK 22B47

<sup>245</sup>Of course, we will not go as far as the iconoclasts of the IX-th century did in considering any representations as idolatry. The question, as always, is about the attitude towards things – enjoyment of artistic expressions, whether religious or not, is very different from *idolatry*.

necessary to make up a person.”<sup>246</sup> The crucial aspect of *non-attachment* lies not in any grandiose opening to the above and ascetic self-denial, but in the small reservation “except in so far...”. *I do not deny visibility, I only renounce the image of its absoluteness.*

97. Another expression for this is “*obedience*” which, however, does not mean submission to any specific agent, even less to any specific commands. It is *obedience to nothing*, that is, to everything. *Obedience* is just another way of saying that *I am not the master* and, on the other hand, that *I am thankful*. These two – not any servile submission, lack of autonomy, sense of inferiority – exhaust the sense of *spiritual obedience*. It is not any conflict of the wills in which one must yield to the other, for only we, limited human subjects, have any will. If it is a conflict, then only of *my will* with *nothingness*, which “is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not.”<sup>247</sup> *Obedience*, or as one often used to say, “*obedience to the Divine Will*”, means only that *I cease to insist on my will*, that is, that *I cease to insist on myself*. “Do not strive to seek after the true, only cease to cherish opinions.” *My ego* is the site of *idols* which disturb more than *I am* ever able to realise, opinions which are *mine* (and true!), images which drive *my will* in all possible, often pleasant, directions. *Obedience* means only (only?) that *I let them go*, *I may still use them*, but *I cease worshiping them*.

*I am not the master and I am obedient* – eventually, this means that *I am nothing*; not having any master and being *obedient to nothing*, *nothing* becomes *my whole treasure*, *nothing* becomes *mine*. *Nothing* is *mine*, not only things, but also the *spiritual choice* is not *mine* – it happens *above me*; even *thirst* is not *mine* – it was only given to *me* as a *gift of remembrance*. *Nothing* is *all you have*, is *your only treasure*, and “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”<sup>248</sup>

98. We react against ‘*obedience*’ which berefts us of our ‘*autonomy*’, just like we think that emptiness is when nobody speaks. But emptiness is when nobody listens, and the *whole obedience* is to listen to the silence, not to any specific orders. It is to accept that *I am not the master*, not finding another one nor even barely looking for one. *Nothing* is the master and *obedience* is but *openness* to its *gifts*, free *thankfulness* lifted *above* all particular gifts, as opposed to the free rejection which loses all its autonomy to the degree it insists on it.

Eventually, *nothingness* listens – it has heard the scream “Release me!” But then we do not have to speak any more. Silence is the ultimate way of communication, and then we also learn that there is no need to speak or be heard. Having anything to say which we want to be heard is *attachment*, images... Expecting anything to be heard is *attachment*, expectation of an image... Silence is a moment of *eternity* in time – nowhere and never happens more than in such a moment.

## Spiritual unity

99. Yes says that the *visible* impossibility does not count. In this sense it renounces *this world*, renounces its pretensions to *absolute validity*. Renouncing all *visibility* leaves only *nothingness*, the place where everything can appear anew. But it is no longer a place divided into *this world* and *another world*. *Incarnated spirit* is the *unity* of – not only a borderline between – the *visible* and *invisible*. In what does this *unity* consists, *concretely*? *Concretely*, in *nothing* particular. “Damn the flesh that depends on the soul. Damn the soul that depends on the flesh.”<sup>249</sup> The *spiritual* unity of soul and body, of higher and lower, modifies but does not change man’s existential situation. Man is a borderline between what is *below* and what is *above* – *visible* is just the other side of *invisible*. The *unity* consists in being *concretely founded* in the *origin*, being *open* to seeing the *aspect of gift* in every *actual situation*.

The *unity* consists also in the fact that *spirit* is directed towards *nothing*. This means simply directedness towards what is *visible*, for “there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?”<sup>250</sup>

<sup>246</sup> *Theologia Germanica*. XLIII

<sup>247</sup> Eckhart

<sup>248</sup> Matt. VI:21; Lk. XII:34

<sup>249</sup> *The Gospel of Thomas*. 112. “Hate and lust for things of nature have their roots in man’s lower nature. Let him not fall under their power: they are the two enemies in his path.” [The *Bhagavad-Gita*. III:34]

<sup>250</sup> Eccl. III:22. Although we will not confuse such remarks with the stoical endurance, which is a matter of resignation and surrender to the world overgoing one’s powers, not of *thankfulness* for its *gift*, we may nevertheless notice affinity of expression: “We must make the best use that we can of the things which are in our power, and use the rest according to their nature. What is their nature then? As God may please.” [Epictetus, *The Discourses*.

Or, we might add, to *see* what is above him?

Actually, no direct, intensional attitude towards the *origin* is needed, if at all possible. Such an attitude is already an indication of a mistake – the one can not be made correlate of our intentions or acts, unless it is reduced to some *objective* from. Intensional acts find place only in the sphere of *visible* contents, *distinctions* which are sharp enough to be turned into *reflective objects*, *objects of action* or of *reflection*. An act aiming at, consciously intending ‘goodness’ is not good. It need not be evil, nor wicked, nor malicious; it may be thoroughly well-intended but it is not good. The intention of ‘being good’ pollutes every act unless it is withdrawn from the sphere of *actuality*, unless it is *nothing*, an *invisible rest*. But this means exactly that it is not any intention, that it does not in any way enter into *my* considerations. ‘Being good’ emerges, as it were, only as a side-effect of acts which themselves are occupied only with their *actual object* and *visible* relations.

This applies to all higher things which one might possibly *posit* as one’s intentions, even goals. An act whose main goal is *to be* compassionate, is not compassionate, just like an act by which *I* try to prove and show my freedom is not free. A person focused on making always ‘right’ decisions may, indeed, happen to make them ‘right’. But he will spend time in constant worry about doing just that. And since ‘right’ is entirely *vague* category, one will never rest. A person focused on his salvation may happen to do a lot of good things, but his focus will always bother him: “Has it already happened or not yet?”

*Spirit*, as contentless relation to *nothingness* is purity and poorness. It does not aim at the spiritual, does not seek it, does not worry about it. This is the only way of its *concrete presence*. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”<sup>251</sup> Walking the spiritual paths may be an expression of a genuine spiritual *thirst* – but this only means, the absence of *spirit*. “Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.”<sup>252</sup> Any strife, any search, whether spiritual or not, is but a lack. The more spiritual such a search is, the more it circles around the *vague* and indefinable ‘that’ and the less it is satisfied with any ‘what’. But spiritual search is not *spirit*. *Spirit* either is, either is thoroughly, *concretely* and *absolutely present*, or it is not at all, is only some unidentifiable and ever missing *rest*, which one may desperately try to replace by some *visible* substitutes or, as the case may be, by the insatiability of *more* which never manages to quench the *thirst*.

*Spirit* is first of all *humility* towards the spiritual, towards the *invisible origin*. By this very token, it directs its attention exclusively towards *this world*, because *this world* is no longer *dissociated from another*, of which *I am not the master*. If we view the ontological *founding* from Book I as the descent of which mystics and philosophers of the neo-Platonic orientation spoke, while its lived and understood *reflection* in the levels of Being from Book II as the corresponding ascent, then the *incarnated love* marks the final and definite return.<sup>253</sup> It does not end in a momentaneous illumination, in an ecstatic contemplation, in any *actual experience* of mystical union with a constant wish for its repetition. It does not live in *another world*, but it does not have to descent into *this world* either – there is only one world, and *actuality* becomes the scene of constant, *concrete presence*. The *origin* is no longer remote and separate – *spiritual love* is nothing else except the attitude towards the *visible world*. *This world* is not *only* a sign of the *other world* – it is *the only sign*, the only form of *invisible presence*.

*Spirit*’s directedness towards *nothing* means that it rests with the mere *that*.<sup>254</sup> As there is nothing more to do about *nothingness* than saying *that* it is, *spirit* is the *restful* return to *this world*. To *rest* is to accept the *invisible rest* – to give up all the attempts at making it *visible* – and in this sense, to *forget* it. *Spirit* is *forgetfulness* of the spiritual.

---

I.1]

<sup>251</sup>Matt. V:3; Lk. VI:20

<sup>252</sup>Ps. XVII:5

<sup>253</sup>This seems to be the natural way to interpret much of the mystical ascent though, of course, there are other possibilities. Hermes Trismegistus is probably one of the clearest examples emphasizing this element of return – not to some sphere above but to *this world*: “as below so above” but also “as above so below”.

<sup>254</sup>You may notice that the verb “rest” here (and the noun “rest” as “tranquility”) is, obviously, something different from the noun “rest” as ‘reminder’ which we have been using earlier. The homonymity, however, serves us perfectly because the equivocation is thoroughly intensional. To *rest* is to admit, to allow for, to accept the *rest*.

## Forgetful remembrance

102. Thus, *spirit* is the renouncement of *this world* and *forgetfulness* of the spiritual. Indeed, *nothing* is left. As soon as something more precise gets involved, a distinct thought, a specific feeling, the *spirit* seems to evaporate, to lose *actuality* giving place to the flesh – perhaps, to *myself*, perhaps, to *my ego* and body. But *I* live only in the world of *distinctions* and this withdrawal is *spirit's* only true presence – it *incarnates* only when the attempts to *actualise* it have ceased. Being *invisible*, it can never become *actual*, but it can be *present* around and *above actuality* which means, in the very midst of it. If you look to the left, you won't find it, if you look to the right, you won't find it, if you look forward or backward, in past or in future, you won't find it. Because, when you look for it, you have already found it, you only have to stop looking. “[The kingdom] will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, ‘Look, here!’ or ‘Look, there!’ Rather, the Father’s kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people don’t see it.”<sup>255</sup> But ‘to stop looking for it’ is as difficult as it sounds easy.

There is a great difference, which may appear as a paradox, between *forgetfulness* and *forgetfulness*, or perhaps, between *forgetfulness* and denial. *Forgetfulness* of the spiritual is the deepest remembrance of *nothingness* – remembrance, however, not in the form of a constant, *actual* remembering, of incessant focus on the desired, even if impossible, *actuality* of the spiritual.<sup>256</sup> It is remembrance which, for the first, remembers only *nothing*, only *that* it is, but does not worry constantly about ‘what’ it is; and, for the second, remembrance which itself is not *actual* but thoroughly *invisible*, which does not enter the sphere of *actual* considerations and intentions and does not try to bring the *invisible rest* into explicit *actuality* of *here-and-now*. It is *forgetfulness* as far as the *actual* occupations of the *subject* are concerned, for these deal only with *visible* things. But as far as *my* being is concerned, it is the remembrance which *I* have become, the *self* which is no longer overshadowed by *my self*, not to mention, by *myself*. *Actual forgetfulness* is the eternal remembrance.

103. By its very nakedness and *nothingness*, *spirit* grants *actuality* all the validity it possesses as the only place of our acts and works. But to find this place, one has to lose it first. *I* can not have anything which *I* have not already lost. Ibsen says, “Only the lost is eternally owned,”<sup>257</sup> but one might sense here some literal and resentful meaning of loss. Bitterness, *closing* one’s world in the ever narrower circle of disappointment, is a frequent companion of *attachment* unable to live the *actual* loss. But ‘having lost’ precedes any *actual* loss and amounts rather to suspending its validity without, however, negating it completely. It is more like an intense joy over a minute thing which as if suspends the validity of the whole world. It does not narrow the horizon to the mere *here-and-now*, but rather opens it up – not for all the things in the vicinity, not for all the *visible* things around, but for the indefinite yet *clear* joy, inflow of its rays. “When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found.”<sup>258</sup> So also on the other hand, if *I* have not lost *this whole world*, if *I* stay attached to it, *I* am not able to fully and deeply enjoy any single thing.

To have some particular thing is to have already lost it, to agree that it is not *mine*, that *I* do not control it. Only then can *I* truly have it. Having already lost it is simply to admit its fragility, which only makes the appreciation greater. Expectation of its possible loss may certainly cause some worry. If, and when, one *actually* loses it, this may certainly cause sorrow and pain. *Spirit* does not abolish such negative moods, thoughts, feelings. On the contrary, it actually *opens* one for their thorough and deep experience. This happens because such worries and sorrows are as real as they are relative, and although they may affect *me*, they do not affect the *tranquil unity* of the *spirit*.

We are not saying that spiritual unity is a tranquiliser, a placebo used against finite failures and *actual* dissatisfactions. *Spirit*, directed towards *nothingness*, is fully directed towards such finite and *visible* things and events, it does not supersede them. It only makes me worry for the

<sup>255</sup> *The Gospel of Thomas*. 113

<sup>256</sup>This is the source of bad conscience, not yet in any moral sense, but in the spiritual sense which transcends the notion of personal guilt; the bad conscience of Luther or Faust or Mann, so characteristic for the Germanic mind and almost unknown to the English ratio-empiricism or French enlightened aestheticism.

<sup>257</sup> *Brand* IV:last scene. “Whoever abandons things as they are accidental possesses them as they are pure being and eternal” [Eckhart *German Sermons* Si.L:10; Ac.I:4. in B. McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart...* 16b;29.]

<sup>258</sup>Anonymous Sufi aphorism [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*.p.106]

things of *this world* without worrying about the ultimate things, without looking for the *absolute* in the *visible*, that is, without establishing *idols*.

It makes *me* care for all finite things because, having founded *my* being in the only *absolute* of *nothingness*, it allows *me* to recognise their fundamental fragility. A thing which *I* could not possibly lose (if such a thing existed) would be, or in any case would turn with time ... worthless. An eternal life, imagined vulgarly as merely temporally infinite, would be, if not unbearable, then eventually boring. And boredom would not come from the fact that there were no new things to encounter. It would come exactly from the fact that there would be nothing else to encounter than mere novelties. Death is the complete return to *indistinctness*. And it is the knowledge of this ultimate *nothingness*, of the fragility of all *visibility*, which makes life so valuable. However, life occupied exclusively with the maintenance of itself, forgetting *that*, i.e., that there is something more worthy than it, perhaps even something for which it could be sacrificed, becomes a mere social, even a mere biological phenomenon – deindividualised, impersonal, eventually, meaningless. Although it is hardly possible to live fully such an idea, it is possible to actually believe it.

Eventually, only *visible* things of *this world* are given to us, so that we can “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”<sup>259</sup> But reducing Being, and what then follows, our being, to such things only, dissociating them from the *nothingness* of their origin (as is typically the case in the attempts to see, re-cognise and admit the value which they do possess), turns them into dead and empty *objects*. It makes us forget so that we do not remember. *Forgetfulness*, too, directs *me* towards *visible* things but not as the only and *absolute* form of Being. *Forgetfulness* makes *me* remember that they are only *signs*, but also that they are the *only*, true and real, *signs* of the *invisible*. “Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you.”<sup>260</sup>

### Losing and winning

*Non-attachment* is the consent to having lost *this world*, it is Yes which, being directed to *nothingness*, is unconditional. And just like No, motivated by the attachment to *this world*, turns it eventually into *nothingness*, so the apparent renunciation of *this world* turns out to be Yes to all the *visible* things. *Non-attachment* is a concrete presence in the midst of *this world*. But it is not the goal to make one so concerned with *this world* – it is only the effect. To achieve it, one has to renounce it, for “the Supreme for which the soul hungers though unable to tell why such a being should stir its longing-reason, however, urging that This at last is the Authentic Term because the Nature best and most to be loved may be found there only where there is no least touch of Form.”<sup>261</sup> Only giving up all the forms, life acquires the ultimate and concrete foundation and so, “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”<sup>262</sup>

We can care for things because we value them to the degree which we do not even realise, we can do good works because our boss, our spouse, other people expect that or because our hidden inhibitions prevent us from doing otherwise. All this has nothing to do with the *spirit*, even if the externally *visible* results may be exactly the same. For external results, as we know, do not count for us as much, and do not give us as deep a satisfaction, as we often would like to believe. They may be necessary but are never sufficient. But we can also care for things and do good works because *spirit* does not distinguish that from the ultimate *humility* – in fact,

<sup>259</sup>Gen. I:26

<sup>260</sup>The *Gospel of Thomas*. 5. Bluntly put, *spirit* is the true life of the flesh, but it lives *only* in and through the flesh. As we learn from the long tradition, one can easily construct contradictions between the two, but easiness as seldom lends any credibility as contradictions witness to health. Say, a ‘contradiction’ between the defense of the lower, sensible world in Plotinus, *Enneads* II:9.*Against the Gnostics* and, on the other hand, passages like V:3.17, footnote 238 or, for instance: “The soul in its nature loves God and longs to be at one with Him in the noble love of a daughter for a noble father; but coming to human birth and lured by the courtships of this sphere, she takes up with another love, a mortal, leaves her father and falls. [...] This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth [...]” [Ibid. VI:9.9] Such ‘contradictions’ disappear once we observe that what is wrong with the lower, sensible, material, *visible* world is not its being as such but our attachment to it. The calls to renunciation of *this world* do not try to negate its reality and even beauty, but only our *idolatrous* attitude with respect to it.

<sup>261</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*. VI:7.33

<sup>262</sup>Lk. IX:24, XVII:33; Mt. X:39; Jh. XII:25

because it does not leave us anything else to do. Care for finite things, work carried out with conscientiousness, respect and *humility*, do keep heaven and earth together. Work – hard, tiring, exhaustive work – which has engaged fully body and mind, makes *me forget*. *Forgetfulness* finds the expression as respect for ‘the order of things’. At the same time, it is the deepest form of remembrance, *forgetfulness* of *spirit*. Sloth is a cardinal sin because there is no such thing as ‘pure spirit’, disembodied, non-incarnated. There is only living, concrete *spirit*, which unfolds itself in the body, in *this world*.

Dedication and thoroughness, hard work and conscientiousness are not, in any case, not necessarily signs of *attachment*. More often than not, they are signs of *spirit*. And as all acts which are expressions of *spirit*, they also strengthen it or, as is often the case, prepare for it. “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.”<sup>263</sup>

To be sure, concrete presence of *spirit* is nothing common. Perhaps, it is even very rare, though it seems that it is less rare than we want to admit or are able to realise. But the fact that no statistical investigation may ever give a slightest indication of it means only that it is the most real, that is, the most individual and personal possibility – unrepeatable, not because of varying visible conditions but because thoroughly concrete; and always the same, because consummated in the same existential situation, in the face of one *nothingness*.

### 3.3.2. Inversions

Before giving some examples of concrete *founding*, there are a few observations to be made.

106. Love has unlimited number and forms of *incarnation* which are always purely personal. Love is a virtual *nexus* which opens unlimited field of possible *manifestations*. “Temperance is love surrendering itself wholly to Him who is its object; courage is love bearing all things gladly for the sake of Him who is its object; justice is love serving only Him who is its object, and therefore rightly ruling; prudence is love making wise distinctions between what hinders and what helps itself.”<sup>264</sup> Furthermore, every concrete *manifestation* of love, although it may seem to express only one or few of its aspects, is always a full expression of all of them. For *nexus* can not be divided and present only partially; only its aspects can possibly exclude each other from the actuality which they fill, leaving no place for others. Say, modesty may seem a natural example of *humility*, but it involves equally *thankfulness* and *openness*. Modesty is not a servile admission of one’s inferiority. It is a humble gratefulness which does not argue about the qualities and conditions of the gift – one’s own achievements and labor being, too, “nothing more than the finding and collecting of God’s gifts.”<sup>265</sup> And it is grateful for everything it obtains, for a person who is now modest and now not, is simply not modest but only behaves modestly in some situations.
107. Now, all the aspects of love are predicated adequately about the spiritual attitude, and only analogically about anything within the visible world. Together with the unity of all the aspects in every expression of spiritual love, this may easily give raise to apparent inversions. Roughly, inversion is a *manifestation* through something which appears as the opposite of the manifested. This happens especially when judged by No which does not recognise anything beyond the visible categories of merely human, or even only egotic, level.
108. Inversions originate in the most general schema of *nothingness* being (the origin of) everything, which is also reflected in the fact that the apparent renunciation of *myself* and *this world* in non-attachment amounts truly to the genuine return to the world. Thirst is a sign of genuine presence, spirit is forgetfulness of the spiritual. The apparent lack may be the true *manifestation*, albeit in an inverted form. On the other hand, the total absence of spirit is, too, its total forgetfulness. On the surface the two extremes may be indistinguishable, for what separates forgetfulness from forgetfulness, presence from absence, is an invisibly thin line.
- Modesty is to do everything one can. Although this is all, it may need an explanation, so let us add: and knowing that one can not do more. My own achievements are also *gifts*, only ones which I can influence. Waiting resigned for a miraculous gift from heaven has nothing to do with modesty; perhaps with laziness or sloth. An achievement is an inverted form of a *gift*. Modesty works with full dedication, it employs all the abilities and potential for achievement of its goals.

<sup>263</sup>Prov. XVI:3

<sup>264</sup>St. Augustine [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*. V]

<sup>265</sup>M. Luther, *Luther’s Works*. 45;p.327 [after P. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*. II:10.1]

It confronts the task and makes *me* disappear in the process of this confrontation – *I* am still there but, in a sense, only for the sake of the task. Modesty is this disappearance of *myself*. Only having done everything, only meeting the limits, one becomes modest. And when one has done everything one could, one also knows it – for knowing that one can not do more *is the same as* having done everything one could. The addition of ‘knowing that...’ does not add anything; it only seduces us to think of ‘knowing’ merely as explicit, *actual* and fully reflective knowing. (It even seduces us to think that what we said may be self-satisfied and detached “I am done with it (‘cos I can’t do anything else).” Modesty is never done with anything, for it knows that no matter what it has done, more could be done, only that it can not do that.)

A person trying actively to accomplish some task may spend a lot of time and effort in this direction. He may become a highly skilled expert with very high professional standards. From outside, and seen only in abstract terms, it may easily look like he is only craving for reputation, recognition or just for professional achievements of which he could be proud. Although often this may be the case, it certainly does not have to be. Modesty depends on one’s capacities and standards one applies to *oneself* – if these are exceptionally high, others will rather see ambition and pride. But the person may – though only may – be full of *openness* and modesty, and what is (typically, in the impersonal sphere of gossip, rumours and newspapers) judged as craving and striving may be but dedication, energy and ... true *humility*.

In short, what appears as arrogance may, in fact, be *thankfulness*; what appears as preoccupation with one’s little world may, in fact, be *openness*; what appears as pride may, in fact, be *humility*. Likewise with the opposite, we never know “under which tempting and affection-rising forms lie can, in spite of everything, penetrate to the deepest layers of [] spiritual honesty.”<sup>266</sup> One does wisely suspending one’s judgment in such matters.<sup>267</sup>

### ***Humility – pride***

109.

“But if there were one in hell who should get quit of his self-will and call nothing his own, he would come out of hell into heaven.”<sup>268</sup> *Spiritual choice* is recognising *myself* as *nothingness*, admitting not only that *I am not the master* but that, in fact, *I am nothing*. If *I* think that *I am* anything – no matter what, wise or not-wise, good or bad, rich or poor – *I am still attached to ‘images’*. “I am a son of X. These are my relatives. I am happy. I am unhappy, I am an idiot, I am a leader, I am pious, I have a relative, I was born, I died, I am old, I am a criminal.”<sup>269</sup> If *I* use any names, not only for the *invisible*, but also for *myself*, *I* think that *I am something*.

Saying, on the other hand, that *I am nothing* and, perhaps also, that *nothingness* is the *origin*, can be construed as proud detachment attempting to rise itself above all such things of fundamental value to most people. One can even attempt to construe *love* and *humility* bordering on holiness as simple egoism, exclusive preoccupation with one’s own self and one’s own salvation – for “that love occupies the highest place in the hierarchy of egoisms does not change the fact that it is egoistic.”<sup>270</sup> However, calling holiness of love for “egoism” is to deny it. Holiness does appear as something higher and, perhaps, distant but, at the same time, it is never absolute ‘otherness’ separated from us by an impassable distance. On the contrary, it always embraces everything around itself as if telling to everybody: that art thou, too. But not hearing this silent voice, one will think the distance to be infinite, and see detachment instead of presence. The *humility* of *non-attachment*, indeed, brings one *above this world* – not, however, in any sense of despising *this world*, of contempt for human weaknesses and vanity of all things, but only in the sense of not accepting anything *visible* as *absolute*. *Humility* is founded in the face of *nothingness* – it

<sup>266</sup>M. Proust, *John Ruskin*.

<sup>267</sup>*Inversion* is more than mere confusion. It is common that, for instance, “vices shew themselves off as virtues, so that niggardliness would fain appear as frugality, extravagance as liberality, cruelty as righteous zeal, laxity as loving-kindness.” [St. Gregory the Great, *Epistles*. Book I:XXV. To John, Bishop of Constantinople, and the Other Patriarchs [Also, *The Book of Pastoral Rule...* II:9]] *Inversions* can indeed give rise to misunderstandings, but it is their inherent feature that what is *manifested* appears *actually* as its opposite. They are more adequately described by St. Augustine: “A father beats a boy, and a boy-stealer caresses. If thou name the two things, blows and caresses, who would not choose the caresses, and decline the blows? If thou mark the persons, it is charity that beats, iniquity that caresses. See what we are insisting upon; that the deeds of men are only discerned by the root of charity. For many things may be done that have a good appearance, and yet proceed not from the root of charity. For thorns also have flowers: some actions truly seem rough, seem savage; howbeit they are done for discipline at the bidding of charity.” [St. Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*. VII:8]

<sup>268</sup>*Theologia Germanica*. LI

<sup>269</sup>Śaṅkara [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. B:II.1.2]

<sup>270</sup>M. Proust, *John Ruskin*.

is humble in the face of *visible* things because they are its *gifts* and *nothingness* penetrates their whole *actuality*. Thus, its *actual manifestations* can indeed be felt as a proud challenge. They need not bear the appearance of obvious humility, inferiority and self-depreciation of an ascetic, if not also a Franciscan, flavor.<sup>271</sup> Just like the ambiguous modesty mentioned above, *humility* may appear, in the eyes of the world, as its exact *inversion*: instead of *non-attachment*, one can see detachment, instead of *humility* – pride raised ‘above this world’.

110. ***Passivity – alertness***

*Openness* founds concrete presence, in fact, *omnipresence* of God in all situations which, *visible* and limited to the *horizon of actuality* as they are, emerge from the *invisible origin*. Every meeting, with a person, with a situation, with a problem, is a *gift*; sometimes, a challenge, sometimes, but a pleasant confirmation, sometimes a plain disaster. No matter what the specific character of this meeting, *I* should be *thankful* for it because, at the bottom of it, the very fact of being able to meet something deserves deepest *gratitude*, and because every such meeting is also a meeting with the *origin*.

This *thankfulness*, however, does not mean that *I* am to fall flat and thank God for bestowing on me yet another disastrous gift. The *spiritual passivity* is only to stop cherishing opinions, to stop *idolising oneself*. It is not to stop discriminating. Being annoyed, being displeased, being disgusted are impressions and feelings one need not get rid of – they are feelings of human saints as much as of human wretches. To be thankful for particulars is to stop absolutising them, to meet them with all the respect they deserve as *signs* of the *origin*, and then to try to place them on the right shelf in ‘the order of things’. And if *I* have no clue where something belongs, then it can stay where it is, at least for the time being. Valuing things we also value our life and express our *gratitude*. The *alertness* and presence of mind is just the steady preparedness to meet things with such an attitude. It is founded in the *transcendent openness*, but it concerns all the *immanent*, particular things. The *spiritual thankfulness* might seem to imply passive acceptance of everything but, as a matter of fact, it is the opposite of slothful passivity or mere aesthetism – it *founds* active and vigilant attitude to all *actual* situations.

111. ***Humility – strength***

Strength isn’t much more than such an *open* alertness. It is not strength of will, it is not strength of abilities but just that – strength, preparedness to meet everything with equal tranquility and *openness*, to face things and be ready to handle them or, as the case may be, to be defeated by them. One is strong when one has learnt that it is impossible to lose, no matter what defeat one might suffer.

This secure determination equals its meek *openness*. Strength has nothing to do with hardness, with the defensive, self-protective shell one can, often with ingenious inventiveness, rise as if in an anticipation of all possible dangers. Hardness is but an extreme case of false security which spends years on designing schemes and laws of things making everything fit neatly here and there, on the right or on the wrong side, and which, eventually, realises that the whole scheme was but a construction; security which, in the most unexpected moment, in the moment of uttermost security and complacency, is suddenly surprised, and that means defeated, to the bottom of its scheme. The fear of unexpected, natural as it might be, and which we might call insecurity, is founded in false security, in *closedness* of *No*, which tries to build walls, houses, cities and yet, all the time, knows *that* there still may be something it did not take into account, although it has no idea *what* it might be. Rising cities, it *thirsts* for the woods and fears fires...

Hardness assumes that situations one has to be prepared to meet are something one has to protect oneself against, are potentially harmful, dangerous. Strength sees the possible dangers, too, but its purpose is not to protect itself. Greatness displays strength. “Great man [...] is strong [...] but he does not desire power. That which he desires is realisation of his intention: realisation of spirit. For this realisation he needs, of course, power because power – if we clean this notion of the dytyrambic pathos in which Nietzsche enveloped it – means nothing else but simply the ability to realise that what one desires to realise.”<sup>272</sup> Greatness does not seek itself, but involves the ability to realise the ‘objective’ intention. Strength, too, will attempt to realise the intention, to maintain ‘the order of things’, but it will not be weakened, as greatness would

<sup>271</sup>It took St. Bonaventura, *doctor subtilis* John Duns Scotus, *venerabilis inceptor* Ockham and few other Friars Minor to overcome the view, inherited after St. Francis', which contemned knowledge for being a sign of pride.

<sup>272</sup>M. Buber, *The Problem of Man*. p.55

be, by its failure. Strength *founded* in *humility* may appear strange but is always unmistakable. It may be associated with the abilities to posit and reach particular goals, but its strangeness consists in that it does not depend on such abilities. It is the strength of not expecting anything particular, of not feeling that one is entitled to this or that, of having given up everything and, therefore, having regained it. It is strength which does not have to search because it has already found, which does not have to fight because it already has everything.

### Above the world – in its midst

112.

All the inversions may be seen as variations of the apparent opposition *transcendence-immanence*. One is fully both: remaining *indistinct* above the world, it is the rest ever present between any *distinctions*. Dissociating these two aspects is the common mistake which may be, partly, blamed on the *inverted* form of *manifestations*. Dissociating the *transcendent* aspect of the *one* yields an abstract idea of some static and immobile, incomprehensible ground. “This ground is some homogeneous silence which remains immobile in itself. And yet from this immobility all things are set into motion and all things receive life, all which live suprasensually, silently in themselves.”<sup>273</sup> The motion belongs apparently to the *visible world*, but the opposition immobile-mobile – like that of *transcendent-immanent*, one-many and most others – is but a construction: it may be required by the actual discourse, but it is harmful when its terms get dissociated.

The inversions are no contradictions but only reflective expressions of the *unity* of the respective *aspects*: *thirst* is the *sign* of presence, *forgetfulness* is the way of remembering, strength is the *sign* of *humility*, vigilant alertness of *thankfulness*, and rising *above* the world, in the genuine sense, amounts to nothing but a full return into its midst. “In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword.”<sup>274</sup>

#### 3.3.3. Examples

The examples of concrete presence may be confronted with the possible variations of the respective experiences which are not *concretely founded*. The main abstract difference between the two is that the former, originating in the *nothingness*, span the whole hierarchy of Being, while the latter are limited to the current level at which they unfold. They may have all the amiable appearances of this level but they are unable to reach beyond it, as if cutting the hierarchy at this point, and so remain *thirsting* for ‘Something’.

### Love

4. Love at the level of *invisible*, the *spiritual* love was described in section 3.2, in particular, §64-§71 113. and 3.2.2. It is the *gift of grace* helped by a reflective attitude of the whole person, which passes from *nothingness* towards the *visible world*, in the unity of *humility*, *thankfulness*, *openness*, as well as other aspects which never exhaust its reality. They are *only aspects*, some *aspects*, of a one unified attitude. All these aspects are not related to any particular region of Being but *found* the unbroken continuity throughout *this* and *another world*. The *concrete founding* of love amounts also to *concrete founding* of the *unity of the world* which ceases to be split into *this* and *another* one.<sup>275</sup> This *unity*, of the world, and of oneself, in the *open confrontation* with the *origin*, is the genuine sense of any *actual experiences* of *unio mystica*. It is the same as *love* and “[i]t is therefore wrong to reproach the mystics, as has been done sometimes, because they use love’s language. It is their by right. Others only borrow it.”<sup>276</sup>

3. At the level of *mineness*, such a *love* will find expressions as a living love with which the *soul* embraces the world or, perhaps, its particular region. The most obvious example is personal love. Love of another person, can have many degenerate forms, but in its true form it is never a separate focusing on this only person with the exclusion of everything and everybody else. A true love of another person is impossible without the presence of the underlying *love*. Love between

<sup>273</sup>Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. B:I.1.5]

<sup>274</sup>Job V:20

<sup>275</sup>In spite of many differences, the following hierarchy can be found to conform closely to that in M. Ibn'Arabi, *The Treatise on Love*, in particular, II:13. Likewise, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*, lists similar stages, though with slightly different characteristics: sensuous appetite for carnal love, love of God for one's own, egoistic sake, love of God for His own sake, and the final union, *adhaesio*.

<sup>276</sup>S. Weil, *Waiting for God*. Forms of the Implicit Love of God:Love of the order of the world;p.109

two people is always immersed into something bigger, something which only the lovers share and which, in its *concrete* and yet *invisible* presence, makes their love offensive to the social law and customs, bringing the lovers out of *this world*, like the magic of the fatal drink, and then the woods of Morois, to which Tristan and Iseult flee from king Mark and his court.

Personal love is the highest form of relation with another, because it is the ultimate form of *sharing – sharing the origin*; it is thus not really a relation but being, as one says, “being together”. As the meeting with another person in the face of a common *foundation*, personal love is a true *communion*, the *communion of sharing the origin*. The two lovers are meeting with something third, something above them both, which lends its meaning and depth to their mutual relation, that is, their being. And in all their *sharing – of life*, that is of the world, of time, of works and days, of joys and sorrows – this *founding element*, this indefinable *rest* remains always *present* as an *invisible* guarantor of their *actual* love. And thus, offering each other only *visible* uncertainties of daily life, they raise from them a rock solid house.

The *concreteness* of such a personal love may involve fascination with this or that feature, this or that characteristic of another person, but all such features are but attractive accidents – they may be needed for *me* to fall in love, but they do not constitute the exclusive *foundation* of this love. This love is directed toward the whole person, which means, toward the person as *transcending* the particular features and particular ways of being and behaving – the person as the center and origin of all such particulars. *I* do not divide the loved person into aspects and traits and decide to love her because of *a, b, c* and *d*. If *I* can tell why *I* love a person, then *I* do not love. Sure, *I* can list a long series of agreeable and wonderful features of this person, but if this list exhausts the reasons, then this is a calculation rather than love.<sup>277</sup>

Love of a person is love of the whole person, the person seen as the site of *incarnation* and this person’s “features, activities, abilities are included into love’s object because they belong to this *particular* person.”<sup>278</sup> In this respect “the loved one is impeccable in his vesture at the very beginning of being, because nothing lowers nor stains him in the first moment of his revelation and being.”<sup>279</sup> *I* may, if not at once then with time, see all the negative sides of the loved person, but to the extent *I* love the person, these are but lower aspects, possible failures which, as a matter of fact, can be charming too.

115. The matter is quite different with a love which is not *founded in love*, but which stops at the level of *mineness*.

The lower we descend into *this world*, the more strength of will may be needed to stay true to the *inspirations* and to nourish the constant intensity of feelings. But the strength of will is needed only to the extent the *original commands* get clouded by the the lower aspects. The very attempts at nourishing and keeping the intensity of the beginnings are already expressions of a loss, that is, expressions of *attachment*, attachment to the past. Whether *I* insist on *my* feelings, *my* expectations, *my* goals it is all attachment to the *visibility* of the past – whether by attempts to preserve it or negate it – which has separated me from the *invisible* source of *love*. Such an *attachment* actually ‘divides’ the loved person, puts ‘+’ at *a, b, c, d* and ‘-’ at *f, g, h*, and when the calculus of ‘+’s and ‘-’s yields a negative result, *I* become disappointed … with the person. The disappointments reflect only the fact that *my* love was not directed towards the whole person – it was cultivated and maintained not for the sake of the loved person, but for *my own sake*.<sup>280</sup> Only preoccupation with *oneself* – with its common form of the sense of entitlement underlying all expectations – can meet disappointments; only nourishing *my own image*, can *I* imagine that the world owes me anything. Disappointment is not a consequence of such an attitude – it is its inherent aspect. And when the traces of one’s commitments do not reach beyond the level of *mineness*, such disappointments can indeed seem to sum up to the *whole* person who, because of *f, g* and *h*, is no longer worthy of *my* love.

There are no disappointments if one, instead of nourishing expectations, nourishes *hope*. *Hope* is the lack of expectations, the acceptance of *thirst*, unreserved *openness*, patience which does

<sup>277</sup> Analogous remarks concerning friendship in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII:3 [1156b]; IX:1 [1164a].

<sup>278</sup> M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*. B:III

<sup>279</sup> M. Ibn'Arabi, *The Treatise on Love*. V:88

<sup>280</sup> A simple example is a love through which *I* merely seek a compensation of some fundamental lack on *my* part. Not (necessarily) a lack of strength or intelligence or success, but a *fundamental* lack which *I* vaguely feel – the emptiness at the bottom of *my soul* which the other person would fill, the uncanny loneliness which the other person would cure, the undefinable dissatisfaction with *my life* which the other person would calm, the *thirst*...

not await. Love is full of hope not because it all the time awaits something new and better, but because it does not – it already has everything. It knows that all the particulars need leniency, respectful openness and acceptance. But such a true patience and care for things and people are not ontological gifts of the origin. They are founded only in the deepest humility and openness. If they are not, the patience and respect will, sooner or later, reach the end and then only laziness can prevent them from jumping to new conclusions.

2. Personal love, which at the level of *actuality* and ego may also be expressed through infatuation, embraces things and situations lending them the character of enchantment and agreeable vitality. This may be a mere feeling, a series of *impressions* which change and pass as soon as infatuation goes away. As Eckhart says about the emotional and sensible love, it “does not unify. True, it unites in act; but it does not unite in essence.”<sup>281</sup> The ‘unity in essence’ is not any emotion, is not a mere infatuation but a lasting love, which immerses the loved one, and the things *shared* with the loved one, in a peaceful presence. The traces of another’s personality, expressed in *actual* situations, transform them into a joy of *participation*. Even situations which otherwise might be inattractive or repulsive, acquire this character through the presence of the loved ones.

The *spiritual love* is a constant *inspiration* for the lower levels, an *inspiration* to embrace, strengthen and invigorate – whether the loved person or the things towards which it turns at a given moment. It is manifested through care and respect for things, as well as for the particular behaviors, feelings and reactions of the loved person.<sup>282</sup> This care and respect need not, of course, mean unconditional acceptance of everything the loved one does. But all particulars which *I* find blamable are placed at the level to which they belong, at the level of *actual failures*, and in no way diminish *my love*. As we know, the blindness of love may not see, and if it sees will excuse, many things which others find inexcusable. Shall we say that this blindness is what we have called an *inspiration from above*? Not necessarily because a mere infatuation may have similar effect. But it does exemplify the general way of *concrete founding*, that is, transformation of the events at the lower levels by the *concrete events* at the higher ones.

Love at the level of *actuality* which is not *spiritually founded*, will be directed at things, typically, things which *I* want to possess, which is just an expression of idealisation of *my ego* as the highest value. It is hard to recognise any true love in narcissistic self-idolatry, but even such extreme forms of egotism may hide themselves behind the appearances of love. Not recognising anything higher than the *actuality* of ego and *visibility* of its *objects*, one can still yearn for *love* and this yearning may easily find occasional expressions of less egotic character. But these will only be occasional expressions, constantly confused by the tyranny of egotic impulses.

Another person is no longer loved only for *my sake*, honestly though confusedly, but for the sake of some particular thing. “*I love her smile*”, “*I love her meekness*”, “*I love her determinacy*”, no matter what particulars happen to arise the reaction, it is only a reaction, it is only a response to an *actual fascination* which is cherished for the sake of satisfaction it gives me.

1. At the lowest level of *immediacy*, love, like anything else, finds only the most momentaneous expressions. Sex may provide a very good example, since the infinite gap separating the purely carnal sex from the event of making love to a loved person will be perfectly clear to anybody who has experienced both extremes. The sensuous pleasure is not necessarily *spiritually founded* in any higher order of things, but it is tremendously modified if such a *founding* has taken place. On the one extreme, it may be a mere moment of escape from the unbearable suffering, a moment of sudden meeting with eternity in the midst of confusion and evil, like is for instance experienced by the war time lovers of Remarque. It may be even more desperate attempt to convince oneself that, after all, there are good things in life, things which, in the brief moments of pleasure let one forget about the otherwise empty and desperate life. All such moments do provide the pleasure they promise, but the pleasure turns out to be insufficient to calm the soul. And then there remains

<sup>281</sup> Eckhart [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*. V]

<sup>282</sup> This is perhaps obvious, but let us emphasize that this care and respect are quite different from Heidegger's care – *Sorge*. *Sorge*, that is, “the Being of Dasein ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world) [...] is used in a purely ontologico-existential manner. From this signification every tendency of Being which one might have in mind ontically, such as worry or carelessness, is ruled out.” [M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. p.192.] This corresponds more closely to our horizon of *experience*, with its *spatio-temporal actuality* confronted with the *non-actual*, which precedes the constitution of time and separate experiences. Care and respect we are talking about here are, to use Heidegger's terminology, precisely ‘ontical tendencies’ which Dasein may or may not realise.

only more pleasure, more intensity, more – “the cry of a mistaken soul”. On the other extreme, a sensuous pleasure of a moment can be peacefully embraced by the context of mutual respect and understanding, and, at the deepest level, of the ineffable love which, by a lucky coincidence, found an *incarnation* in the other person, in this very moment, like an inexplicable gift which never ceases to surprise and please.

119. We will not try to reduce such considerations to a mere contextuality of *actual experiences*. The context of an experience is a *more* of other experiences, and a well experienced and well paid whore can create such a context. One can only buy moments, *actualities*, separate, scattered parts. But such parts, and contexts which are their *complexes*, especially if they are merely bought, will never sum up to an experience which in a single moment traverses the whole hierarchy of Being and reaches smoothly to the deepest intimacy of *transcendent presence*. One does not reach the origin by taking, one after another, the same single step at a time, even though taking one step at a time is all we can do. In all pleasant delusions, which *I* bought or arranged, which *I* find purposeful and satisfying, *I* always also know – if only *I* do not ask too intensely – that they are but momentaneous pleasures, delights of a hedonist, real because *actual* and insufficient, perhaps even empty and unrewarding, because *only actual*.
120. There is no such thing as a *single experience* which is not permeated by the whole Being, and it would be as useless to focus on this fact as it is impossible to ignore and forget it. There is no such thing as a true moment of love, unless this moment is immersed in the texture (not context) of body, ego, soul and spirit, which all together agree on the *humility of love* – in an agreement which goes beyond the bottom of one’s soul and heart, where the *spiritual love incarnates*. Only this whole texture lends the *actual* moment its full meaning, only it makes up its *quiddity*, makes it ‘this concrete experience’ rather than ‘that’. No visible rules can ever grasp this distinction with the adequacy and precision the *actual* reason might desire. And yet, everybody knows it and most people can also recognise it.

### The communion

121. *Communion* is *sharing* and that which is *shared* determines the character of the *communion*, in particular, whom the *communion* includes and the way in which the others are experienced. Nature and the physical world is not ours, we *share* it with all the physical things and living organisms, and this is a form of *communion*. We *share* more with animals than with dead things, and more with higher animals than with lower ones. We *share* quite a lot with all other people, but there are always special people, friends, family, the loved ones with whom we *share* much more than with the mass of anonymous individuals.

That which is *shared* is not to be confused with that which is merely common. Common – in its full ambiguity of universal and ordinary – is the *objective* version to which *sharing* reduces when seen only from the perspective of *actuality*. What is ‘common’ can not be *shared*, it can only be multiplied, like a universal instantiated in many particulars, like the sexual drive, common to most animals but never *shared* by any two. Looking for most ‘common’ features and traits which, as one thinks, would promote the most universal communication or the sense of community, leads only to reducing everything to the least common denominator, to that which being the most universal is also the most ordinary. Such a search for universality is an attempt to capture *more*, to overcome the *horizontal transcendence* – it may be useful, but never *concrete*.

*Sharing*, on the other hand, refers always to the *vertical transcendence*, what is *shared* is eventually *above me*. *Sharing* is not a relation between individuals, but being-together, that is, *participating-together* in the *one* and the *same*.

122. 4. The ultimate *communion* is *sharing the origin*, which does not get multiplied and distributed between many, but which remains *one*, undivided and *indistinguishable*. That *I have the origin* does not mean that it is *mine*. It means only that *I* have originated, that *I was born* – the *origin* remains *above me*, and thus can never be *mine*, it is *mine* as much as it is *yours*. In the expressions like “having the *origin*”, the word “having” does not express the possession but ...its opposite: *participation*.

Having the *origin* is the same as *sharing* it, for everything has originated from *nothingness*. It thus *founds* the highest form of *communion*, the *communion of participation*, that is, of being. The

origin is *shared* – with whom? With nobody in particular, with *nothing*, that is, with everybody. This *communion* permeates the whole world, includes all the people, all visible and *invisible* things, everything which is. It is perhaps a form of mysticism, the exact opposite of the detachment from *this world*, the deepest form of *communion* which announces “That art thou”, which encounters everything *sub specie aeternitas*, as a manifestation of the same origin.

Metempsychosis is perhaps one of the oldest expressions of the feeling of such a *communion*. But it is only a conceptualisation, is the experienced unity brought to the level of *visible signs*, perhaps, to an attempted explanation. “For I was once already boy and girl, // Thicket and bird, and mute fish in the waves.”<sup>283</sup> Interpreting such pronunciations as declarations of metempsychosis is a vast over-interpretation. They express genuine feelings, but ones which manifest only something *transcending* any expression, that is, something which may be present also without any expression. One could hardly postulate migration of souls without recognising that also animals and even things possess souls, that they too *participate* in one and the same. Metempsychosis is but an image of this *recognition* and hence, eventually, of the experienced unity. And likewise, its images are the feelings of universal life and ensoulment, “knowing that all things have their emanations,”<sup>284</sup> the sense of deep kinship which permeates us and lets things grow into and out of us:

*Durch alle Wesen reicht der eine Raum:  
Weltinnenraum. Die Vögel fliegen still  
durch uns hindurch. O, der ich wachsen will,  
ich seh hinaus, und in mir wächst der Baum.* <sup>285</sup>

Sharing the *origin* has also a more primordial aspect of *origin sharing* itself. The world is a result of *dissociations*, of *objectivisation* and *externalisation*, but it is also the world *unified* in its nature of a *gift*. This nature means exactly that it is *shared* – not *by me* with others, but *with me* as a *gift of transcendence*. As a *gift*, the world is not *mine* at all – it is *shared with me* by its *origin*. As such a *gift* of the world, the *confrontation* with the *origin* is the primordial *communion*. This *communion* of the *origin sharing* itself, the existential confrontation which is not opposition but openness, can be called the dialogical character of existence. The concrete God, the incarnated Godhead, is thus the one who *shares* the *gift*, Thou who communicate, a partner of a dialogue, albeit a dialogue which knows no words, the silent dialogue which existence conducts with its *origin*. “Every concrete hour which, with its world content and destiny, is allotted to a person, is a noteworthy language.”<sup>286</sup>

As was observed in II:§107, the higher things are also those which admit of more unconditional *sharing*, which are less diminished by being *shared* among more. Since the *origin* is common to all of us, it is most intimately *shared* by all, we all *participate* in one and the same source from which our lives and worlds originate. This *spiritual sharing* is not sharing of this or that, but is *sharing of the origin*. To the extent we truly *share* any *actual* things or moments, any *visible* entities which by and in themselves can only be multiplied or divided but not *shared*, we do so only in the light of this *invisible communion*.

3. The center of personal being, the emergence from the *confrontation* with the *origin*, has thus the character of a dialogue, of a *confrontation* with another. This other is not, however, any foreign otherness but the most *concrete* Thou, in the face of whom *I* become *myself*. “Man becomes *self* through Thou.”<sup>287</sup> This primordial dialogue, when expressed at the level of *mineness*, as a dialogue with another person, amounts not to exchanging opinions, observations and views of life, not even to agreeing on any such issues, but to the *recognition* of the fact of *sharing* the same *origin*, of *participation* in the same, higher sphere of Being. The genuine *community* is simply *recognition* of the *communion*. *Recognition*, of course, is not necessarily *re-cognition* and has basis in the rest of *original signs*, in the sense of unity only vaguely discernible in the background of *actual* intentions. “It seems to me that both in the order of (atemporal) *founding* of functions and in the order of genetic development, the feeling of unity «is the fundament» of sympathy [*Nachfühlen*].

<sup>283</sup> Empedocles DK 31B117

<sup>284</sup> Empedocles DK 31B89

<sup>285</sup> R. M. Rilke, *Es winkt zu Fühlung...*

<sup>286</sup> M. Buber, *Dialog*. I:Verantwortung. «Jede konkrete Stunde mit ihrem Welt- und Schicksalsgehalt, die der Person zugewandt wird, ist dem Aufmerkenden Sprache.»

<sup>287</sup> M. Buber, *I and You*. I. «Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich.»

This statement concerns, of course, only the emotional *functions* and not the emotional states.”<sup>288</sup>

Thankfulness for the *gift* of life and world amounts to trust and fidelity, for acceptance of everything leaves simply nothing to mistrust and betray. In the same way, the *community* of this *gift* is also the *concrete foundation* of the mutual trust. At the bottom, it is only the *recognition* that, eventually, the other is a person like myself, *sharing* the same *origin*, *thirst* and all significant spheres of *experience*. “Acceptance of the sameness of reality conditions the spontaneous emergence of love to a human being, that is, love to a being only because he is «human».”<sup>289</sup> In fact, not only love, but any truly personal relation – of love or deep admiration, of dedication or respectful enmity – is based on such a recognition. In a bit different words, it requires recognition of the *whole* person, that is, recognition that the other reveals to *me* something that is so intimately mine, that it is impossible to say what precisely it is. The deepest truths of my *existence* are reflected in such relations to the others, for the *community* of our differences is *concretely founded* only in the sameness of the *origin*. What is so reflected, what is being *shared*, might seem to be both *mine* and *yours* but, as a matter of fact, it is neither *mine* nor *yours*, for it is *shared* only by being *above us both*.

‘Recognition and apprehension of the whole person’ is exactly to see this person as *sharing* the *origin*, as having an *invisible pact* with God, just like the one *I* have. “Human life touches the absolute through its ‘dialogical character’; [...] man can become whole not through a relation to his own self but only through a relation to another self. This other self may be equally limited and conditioned as he is, but in being together one experiences that which is unlimited and unconditional.”<sup>290</sup> Buberian emphasis on the dialogical element is obviously concerned with the experience and the form of the experienced, which we certainly can accept. But we are more concerned with the *foundation* of such experiences which, as also Buber maintains, is the unconditional, or *absolute*. The dialogical experience can be also an *experience* of the unconditional.<sup>291</sup> But the unconditional *presence* is not the *object* of such an *experience* – it is the *rest experienced* only *along the actual situation, through* the meeting with the other. It is the *participation* in the *absolute* which *founds ontologically* such experiences, and only the genuine *openness* of Yes which *founds* their concrete possibility.

This *founding* can be expressed by saying that the *community* is established always via way of God. “If we both see that that which thou sayest is true, and if we both see that what I say is true, where, I ask, do we see it? Certainly not I in thee, nor thou in me, but both in the unchangeable truth itself which is above our minds.”<sup>292</sup> In the deepest respects I understand you only because I already *participate* in what you might want to communicate. Indeed, “in simple substances this influence of one monad over another is only *ideal*, and it can have its effect only through the intervention of God.”<sup>293</sup> Likewise, a reader responds to the author’s appeal and joins him “at the virtual center of the writing, even if neither one of them is aware of it.”<sup>294</sup> Or as Buber says it: “Above and below are tied to each other. His word, who attempts to speak to man, without speaking to God, does not fulfill itself...”<sup>295</sup>

---

<sup>288</sup>M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*. A:VI.a. Scheler’s *Nachfühlen* means, literally and inelegantly, re-feeling (or feeling-after) and is intended as an emotional re-presentation of an object or another’s experience. It is, in turn the fundamennt of empathy, *Mitfühlen*, literally, co-feeling, feeling-with.

<sup>289</sup>Ibid. A:VI.c

<sup>290</sup>M. Buber, *The Problem of Man*. II:1.5

<sup>291</sup>Dialogues with other persons do not exhaust such *experiences*. An unexpected *recognition* may often give rise to it, as when we suddenly get swept by the immense beauty of a landscape. An experience in which the fact of encounter comes strongly forth, involves often equally the sense of unity. These two aspects together constitute the dialogical character of experience. Mystical experiences provide many examples, while here is a bit more mundane case of a similar force: “From a low hill in this broad savanna a magnificent prospect opened out to us. To the very brink of the horizon we saw gigantic herds of animals: gazelle, antelope, gnu, zebra, warthog, and so on. Grazing, heads nodding, the herds moved forward like slow rivers. There was scarcely any sound save the melancholy cry of a bird of prey. This was the stillness of the eternal beginning, the world as it had always been, in the state of non-being; for until then no one had been present to know that it was this world. I walked away from my companions until I had put them out of sight, and savored the feeling of being entirely alone.” [A. Jaffé, ed., *Memories, Dreams, Reflections of C. G. Jung.* , CC, p.14-15]

<sup>292</sup>St. Augustine, *Confessions*. XII:25

<sup>293</sup>G. W. Leibniz, *The Monadology*. 51. (With all possible reservations against the particular ways in which Leibniz imagined God and this ‘intervention’.)

<sup>294</sup>M. Merleau-Ponty, *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*. 77 [after M. S. Muldoon, *Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty on narrative identity*.]

<sup>295</sup>M. Buber, *Dialog*. I:Oben und unten. «Oben und unten sind aneinander gebunden. Wer mit den Menschen reden will, ohne mit Gott zu reden, dessen Wort vollendet sich nicht...» The sentence continues: “but his word,

The other is not such an ultimate strangeness as some preachers of ‘otherness’ – opposing with certain right the centuries of sameness, leveling off and evening out – would like to see him. If not at the sociological level (which nourishes much of the ‘otherness’ talk), then certainly at the human level the other is, for the most, the same. The other is the same as you – only another. One birth, like every absolute beginning, is virtually the same as any other – only numerically distinct. Sure, he is a different person, with whom I even may be unable to communicate – not to mention, to agree. But communication and agreement have all too often been degenerated to a petty accord of opinions or a sheer coincidence of wordings to deserve some censuring. I can not understand the other by the sheer act of accepting his otherness. Accepting otherness means nothing else but searching deeper into oneself (which does not mean looking for more discoveries *about* oneself but searching for the harmony *of* and *in* one’s self). I understand, or at least can understand the other, only because, at the bottom of our souls (and this is much deeper than any psychological, sociological or political constructions can ever reach) we share the most fundamental aspects of existence: eventually, we share the origin, stand before the same God.

Community has, of course, also the inter-personal, cultural or sociological dimension.<sup>296</sup> The above, universally human community becomes relativised as sharing concerns more specific contents. But it is all the way founded on sharing. It is not so that, for instance, problems or enemies create community; at best, only common problems and common enemies do. But in order to be common they must threaten some shared dimension, that is, they only reveal, make visible the community which has already existed.<sup>297</sup>

It is essential for a community to share something which *transcends* mere actuality. A group of mere common interests, an actual group which shares only a hobby or a problem, is not a community. Any group of only actual goals or interests is as relative and transient as these goals and interests themselves – it may be only a surrogate of a community. A community transcends any actual horizons, it may be a cultural tradition, a nation, a tribe, a family. I once heard a native American saying to his children: “White people have been here for 500 years, we have been here for 15000 years. They make choices based on what seems cool and advantageous to them but this is not how we make our choices. We have got this land and we have to care for it for future generations. Our private wishes are not what counts most.” Belonging to a tribe is to belong to the world which is far greater than me, is to be only a member of a community which *transcends* the sphere of my life. The respect shown for one’s land and its tradition is an expression of sharing something which does not belong to anybody, which is greater than me and you, than our ancestors and successors. Similarly, the respect for the ancestors, or generally for the history (of the nation, tribe, family), is an expression of the constitutive role of the transcendence – not only the mythological beginnings, but the whole past of the community lies beyond our actual grasp, and its great moments express and witness to the unity of the shared ethos and origin.

At the personal level, the unfounded community recognises the other as you but not as Thou. You may be an equal partner, perhaps a guide or a friend, with whom I can establish a community through interaction and sharing values, views, life-style, something more than mere goals and contents dictated only by the actual situation. But as long as not concretely founded, this remains

---

who attempts to speak to God, without speaking to man, goes astray.” [«aber wer mit Gott reden will, ohne mit den Menschen zu reden, dessen Wort geht in die Irre.»] Concrete founding of communion means that, indeed, existentially the spiritual Yes and the true communion with others are indistinguishable, or better, co-extensional – whenever there is the one, the other is too. But we are trying to be a bit more pedantic than Buber – the dialogue with God, the concrete founding is still founding, and it founds a whole nexus of aspects of which communion with others is only one.

<sup>296</sup>In terms of the mere objective time and the sheer numbers this might seem to be much more of a ‘community’ than the personal relations which concern us. However, we do not study sociology, nor even the individual reflections of a social domain. Such a reflection is possible only because the individual is already a dialogical being, capable of genuine sharing independently from the form of community into which he is born. Moreover, it is the personal relations which open most directly the sphere of community in the face of the same origin. The tribal, communal, social, traditional organisation will first of all veil and entangle the direct, original signs of sharing into the objective – and hence both lasting but also less readable – forms of symbols and other reflective signs. To become a member of a community means often to decipher the codes of its tradition in a way which allows me to live them satisfactorily, that is, with a personal conviction but also with a full respect, though not unreserved openness, to other traditions.

<sup>297</sup>One might be tempted to see in various ‘encounters with ufos’, in much of the science-fiction frenzy and in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, the signs reflecting a relatively high level of global consciousness which sees humankind as a unity but, scared by its apparent emptiness, that is, lacking foundation, still needs ‘another’, a ‘common neighbour’ if not enemy, as its external and objective guarantor.

an incomplete relation. The relation will carry the negative counterparts to those listed in §123: I may recognise you as simply different person, without recognising that we share the origin, I may reduce the shared to something merely common, eventually, some actual contents which tend towards objective and egotic characteristics. Thus our relation, bereft of higher foundation, becomes afraid of every conflict at the level of actual opinions and decisions, becomes threatened by more and more minute details, like ebbing love often does. As always, whatever is not concretely founded, which in particular means, founded in something higher, tends toward its lower version.

*Unfounded communion* at the level of mineness is still sharing. It is not, however, sharing something higher but sharing myself, whatever I happen to understand by this at the moment. I can dedicate my activities to a common good, to a beneficial work for the society, I can become personally engaged – but in all that I share only myself. Focusing on the categories of mineness, I will tend to oppose selfishness to unselfishness, the circle of my private life and interests to the good and interests of others, and the engagement into the latter will easily assume a character of a sacrifice on my part. No matter how possibly useful and socially valuable, such an attitude, called by Kierkegaard “ethical”, finds itself in a constant conflict which it is unable to resolve otherwise than by negating it or turning my attachment into an idol of my generosity, my benevolence, my self-sacrifice.

But as “one cannot will into void,”<sup>166</sup> all my dedication must be directed towards some positive contents and values. A common form of this is ‘identification’ with one’s community, various cases of communal or, perhaps, communistic consciousness, when the abstractly universal good and interests of this community (however they are understood) become one’s highest values. When one’s community – tribe, nation, class, religion – is the only source of truth then, indeed, nationalism or tribal consciousness acquire unhealthy form of dogmatism. Such an absolutisation of a relative is possible only because one does not recognise its foundation in a deeper, higher sphere – here it ends, there is nothing above, and this is the last, absolute truth, its final expression.

126. As a matter of fact, relativism is an example of such an *idolatry*, of the inability to recognise the ultimate value above the multitude of visible differences. It is different from ego- and ethnocentrism in that it avoids absolutisation of one particular ethos. But, staying at the same level, it is only its complementary and inverted side which does not reach any deeper.

“Every person coming to the world brings something new, something that has never existed before, something original and unrepeatable. [...] Every man is a new event in the world and is called to fulfill his uniqueness on earth.”<sup>298</sup> So far, so good, but here comes a related expression, which apparently only elaborates the same idea. “Everything happens as if the multiplicity of persons – does not the sense of the word “personality” reside exactly therein? – were the condition of the appearance of the full ‘absolute truth’, as if every man through his unrepeatability guaranteed revelation of one unique aspect of the truth, and its other aspects would never be revealed if some persons were missing among the people. It suggests that the totality of truth is a sum of innumerable personal parts [...]”<sup>299</sup> We see the reappearing tension between One and Many, which tries to disappear in the close relationship between the perspectivism of the latter and the pantheistic understanding of the former. This last quote suggests that the absolute is somehow the sum of the individual perspectives. But such a sum is only a posited totality, not anything absolute, it is the vertical transcendence of the one thought in terms of the horizontal transcendence of multiple actual manifestations. The unrepeatability of every man is founded in the very confrontation with the absolute; it does not merely add a bit to its actualisation. But taken in the merely horizontal dimension, it turns indeed into the ultimate relativism, where the absolute aspect of every separate existence does not carry more weight than that of the actually different contents, of one actual part of the whole. Like all the attempts to reduce the absolute to the actual (whether the pantheistic totality, regulative ideas of reason, truth as the inaccessible limit, etc.), it results in delegating the absolute not only to the sphere of transcendence (where it indeed resides) but also out of the sphere of immanence, outside the horizon of anything an individual might ever confront with full concreteness.

We follow only the first of the above quotes. The uniqueness and unrepeatability of every

<sup>298</sup> M. Buber, *Man's way according to the Chassid teaching*. p.22

<sup>299</sup> E. Lévinas, *L'Au-delà du verset*. [after M.-A. Ouaknin, *Ouvertures hassidiques*.] (The following is only an elaboration of this expression which, for Levinas' part, we would be willing to take as a bit unfortunate metaphor. Accusing him of pantheism and relativism would certainly be unjust, though shadows of both can be occasionally discerned behind eschatological predilections.)

existence not only does not exclude the *confrontation* with the *absolute* but is *founded* exactly in it. Every existence is a reflection of the same *absolute*, not a part of it, but an *absolute* image, *imago Dei*. The images may differ without ceasing to be the images of the same and without implying that only their sum total catches the glimpse of what they reflect. “And just as the same town when seen from different sides will seem quite different, and as it were multiplied *perspectively*, the same thing happens here: because of the infinite multitude of simple substances it is as if there were as many different universes; but they are all perspectives on the same one, according to the different *point of view* of each monad.”<sup>300</sup> The differences of perspectives emerge with the visible contents where, indeed, every one may have his own view and understanding. However, ignoring the lowest and most trivial cases, these differences do not result from any subjective choices. At the bottom of it, nobody decides which perspective he will entertain – one’s perspective is an integral aspect of one’s concrete existence and evolves along with it. Above all, it concerns only *visibles*, for even our understanding of the *invisibles* and *absolute* is only *actuality* of *visibles*. Consequently, all these differences never sum up to give any whole, because the *absolute* is not any *totality* of *visibles*. All the *actual* differences are equally *founded* in one and the same, and all existences are equally *confronted* with it. To reach this *confrontation* no addition is needed, because the *absolute* is not any *totality* of differentiated contents, but their prior *unity*.<sup>301</sup>

The problem is that the *unity* of this ultimate *communion* is a mere *that*, while one would rather like to find it in something more particular, in some *visible* ‘whats’. But as no particular ‘whats’ seem to offer the answer... Relativism is but a variation on this theme of egocentrism, is but its inversion absolutising the absence of deeper values which would still be *visible*. It is, like egocentrism, the inability to recognise anything higher than the *visible* divisions, but combined with the inability to sign the doom which narrow-minded egocentrism pronounces on all otherness. The inability to recognise something higher is simply a sign of lacking self-respect, of the fact that one’s own or one’s own community’s values are not so convincing and deep as *that* one is *thirsting* for. Genuine respect in disagreement, recognition of other values which *I* do not share, can be *founded* only in *sharing* of their source. If such a source is not found while, at the same time, one feels uneasy absolutising the *mine* with all its historical and social contingency, then indeed, the only possibility is to state relativity of all *visible signs*. This relativity of relativism is not, however, the relativity of the *actual sign* anchored in the *absolute origin* but, on the contrary, the mere arbitrariness of this *sign* as opposed to that *sign*. Relativism is grounded in the inability to find anything higher than the multiplicity of *actual signs*. The problem with relativism (a bit like with negative theology) is not that it is too extreme but, on the contrary, that it does not go far enough. Relativism is *idolatry* which seems and claims to have escaped all *idols*. It does not put this value/nation/group/... in front of that, it does not *idolise* this, by putting it above that. It does not. But it *idolises* some level of, usually, *visible distinctions* as the absolute one, above which no more *unity* can possibly obtain.

Now, *I* can be proud of belonging to *my* nation, *I* can be even willing to sacrifice *my* life for it, but if this nation is the deepest value which *I* am capable to recognise then it will easily end in nationalism of a dubious shade. However, *I* may be proud of that and, at the same time, recognise the possibility of others’ being proud of belonging to their nations and even of some not bothering about such a thing at all. The conflict between one ethos and another may be of fundamental character but for the most it is a conflict resting on the absolutisation of *visible expressions*, of the *signs* which merely announce, always only in one particular form, the *invisible presence* which is truly *shared*.

*I* can live thoroughly the values of *my* cultural or religious formation and, at the same time, recognise equally thorough validity of other values. But for this recognition to be genuine and honest, *I* must first find the true *inspiration* in the values *I* am living, that is, to recognise their

<sup>300</sup>G. W. Leibniz, *The Monadology*. 57. It is not clear to us if it bothered Leibniz whether this very statement is or is not only one possible perspective – of the monad actually pronouncing it.

<sup>301</sup>Thus, while the usual perspectivism, claiming that there are only different perspectives, must end in relativism, our ‘perspectivism’ admits not only different views, but also different levels of views, which all are only reflections of the *one*. “Surely the diversity isn’t in the thing gazed on, but in the *way* of gazing on it [...] While the same thing is understood, nevertheless it’s not understood equally.” [P. Abelard, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*. II:(325)] Dissolution of particular ‘substances’ and ‘essences’ notwithstanding, we still (or rather exactly for this reason) have *one* and only *one* to *share* and understand. This *unity* is raised above all perspectivism.

*spiritual foundation.* This recognition of, at once, relativity and *absolute foundation*, involves perhaps a bit more self-respect than one is used to, but is far from impossible. Now, just like all *visibility* is *founded* in the *invisible*, so all *presence* of the *absolute* is interwoven into the matter of *this world*. There is no other way of *participation* than through some form of tradition, historical consciousness and involvement into the *actual world*. Only through *visibility* is the *invisible present*. My task is to recognise the *manifestations* of this presence in the world in which *I live*. The multiplicity of religions is but an expression of the unavoidable *incarnation* of the *invisible* in the *visible*. And to the extent these are true religions, that is, to the extent they are based on the recognition of *invisible origin above this world*, they all provide means for finding a way to rebirth and salvation. The fact that somebody born in Tibet does it on the way of Buddhism, while somebody born in Europe on the way of Christianity, does not in any way diminish the ultimate *sharing*. This *sharing*, however, does not mean uniform agreement. It is possible only by living one's own, *concretely founded* ethos, for the differences between cultural and religious formations, relative as they are, are thoroughly real. Originating in the same, they reach the level of *actuality* where all our *acts* take place. To the extent *I live* an ethos of a *community*, *I can live* only one such at a time, and whoever tries to live more than one, ends up living neither. But there is no need to live more than one, because each true ethos is a full expression of all levels of Being. If one does not find it here, one won't find it there, and if one finds it there, one will see that it has been here all the time. It takes an analphabet to believe that the 'truth' is written somewhere else. The inability to recognise the deepest values embodied in one's culture underlies the ecstatic escape towards 'otherness' and its 'truth', and is only a stage of relativism. in which one ends up allowing all possibilities, that is, being unable to relate to any. For where everything is allowed, nothing has any value. Merely allowing for other values or forms of worship, in a truly democratic and relativistic way, is to disrespect them as much as to disrespect one's own. To respect them, is to recognise their genuine *foundation*, but "we must have [first] given all our attention, all our faith, all our love to a particular religion in order to [be able to] think of any other religion with the high degree of attention, faith, and love that is proper to it."<sup>302</sup> True religion is but a form of ultimate *sharing*, and finding it once, one has no need of finding it once more somewhere else. But if I did not find it, I keep looking and, in the course of deeper and deeper disappointments, I can eventually start believing that it is nowhere to be found, and that I should get rid of my ladder, once I have climbed on it to the roof of this 'insight' in the relativity and mere auxiliary role of all particular ladders.

129. 2. The *actual* expressions of *founded communion* amount to *sharing* the *actual* experiences, situations, problems. One would be tempted to mention here also joys and sorrows, pains and satisfactions, but let us be a bit careful. A multitude of *acts* can express *sharing* – *acts* of cooperation and exchange, of compassion and helpfulness, of criticism and appraisal... Such *acts* address the *actual* situation involving, perhaps, the other's problem or achievement. This problem or achievement is not something which belongs to the other and is privately his, just like your problem is not merely yours – they are just that: problems, achievements, sorrows, joys. When you meet them, they are simply there and become yours by arising your reaction. They are *shared* to the extent you recognise their *objective* character and do not focus on the fact of their belonging only to the other. The strongest form of such *sharing* is actually living the same *experience*, for instance, the loss of a beloved child by parents or more trivial examples of group or team *sharing*, along with the same goals, the successes and defeats in their realisation. But the same structure underlies genuine *sharing experiences* which, phenomenologically, belong initially to other person. Meeting a smile, a joyful spark in the other's eyes, a happy moment in his life, you do not *share* it by observing it, concluding that it belongs to another, and then deciding to participate in it. Neither do you *participate* in it by trying to evoke the feelings and impressions the other might have. To the extent you *participate* in it, to the extent you *share* it, the fact that it is another's and not yours is thoroughly real, yet of negligible importance: a part of the world, the *actual* situation is *shared* and it is neither his nor yours. And although *reflection* will tell you that there is a sharp *distinction*, you know that it is not telling the whole truth.

*Sharing* other's joys and happiness which, on the face of it, are entirely irrelevant for us, expresses genuine *communion* for, as we know, it is not always so easy to overcome the sense of envy which witnesses to egotic limitations. Let us, however, use as a much more common example

---

<sup>302</sup>S. Weil, *Waiting for God*. Forms of the Implicit Love of God:The love of religious practices;p.119

compassion. It is not any feeling which has to be aroused in order to reproduce another's pain. *Actual communion* is not a mere empathy, a mere emotional identification with that which is other's. Reducing *actual communion* to empathy, misconstrued as entering into another's feelings, is a *subjectivistic reduction*, which not only misses completely the nature of the phenomenon but also precludes the *subject* from leaving its solipsistic universe. In fact, compassion need not be (though it often is) accompanied by any specific feelings. Feelings, moods and impressions are only *signs* – as all *signs* – of something *transcendent*, that is, not reduced to their *subjective immediacy*. They reveal an aspect of the world and point to something which can also be revealed in other ways. People with apparently cool and unemotional personality are capable of perfectly compassionate attitudes and acts, no less so than others. *Sharing* expressed in an act of compassion need not be accompanied by any specific feelings – but it must be *concrete!* It must spring from the depth of your person, not necessarily from any *actual* and deep feelings but from the *recognition* of the need of it, of the call from the *actual* situation to you. The fact that you can genuinely feel *with* another, pain or joy, is secondary to the fact that you relate to the same sphere of the world from which his pain or joy arises. You do not feel *his* pain, and you do not even try to *imagine* it. You feel *your* pain which participates in the same – *shared* – painful experience as does his pain. Whether this experience is given to you also through other forms (for instance, you know why he is in pain, or even why he should be in pain even if he does not seem to be) or only through his painful expression, is only of secondary and minimal importance. Your compassion addresses this experience to which his reaction was pain.

As it happens, *shared* pain diminishes. "Pain is alleviated when friends share the sorrow."<sup>303</sup> Of course, one might say, the pain of the one who suffered first, but not of the one who joins in. But no, the pain of both or, let us put it this way, the 'total amount of pain'. Pain and suffering is not any *invisible* truth which only increases by being *shared*. On the contrary, particular pain – just like money – diminishes when it is *shared* with another, it becomes divided between all who *share* it. For the other, who comes with compassionate support, it diminishes to the same extent as it diminishes for the one who was suffering. For what *motivated* compassion was pain which he experienced, perhaps in a very different way from the one *actually* suffering, but still entirely and really. Moreover, genuine compassion comes with the voluntary acceptance of the pain. This acceptance does not intend any compassion. It is a mere *act*, a mere answer to the call which is *founded* in – we may say, dedicated exclusively to – the ultimate *communion*, that is, Yes for which pain is not evil but trial.<sup>304</sup>

In a given situation, compassion is directed exclusively and completely towards the person and yet, in a sense, it is completely 'impersonal'. This 'impersonality', however, is an expression of deepest respect for the person. The situation where, for instance, I act compassionately towards the suffering person but only because and in so far as he is a member of ... my family, my group, my nation, is not an example of compassion but of its misunderstanding. The suffering person is the *absolute center* of the situation and compassion is an expression of the ultimate *communion* – with *this* person. "It is not so that «compassion – as such – is shameless», as Nietzsche says, but compassion without love towards the one whom we compassionate. [...] Therefore we notice also that every expression of compassion *without* love to the person is felt as a brutality."<sup>305</sup> 'Love to the person' is the *concrete foundation* of *actual* compassion. Its ultimacy, or as we said "impersonality", means only that if the suffering person happened to be somebody else, the compassion would still be the same. In particular, this expresses only the *concrete foundation*, not any universality of compassion, of which the present person would be only 'an instance'. Compassion is a property of *acts*, not of life. It is not like *love* which, underneath every act and activity, extends to the whole world. Suggesting such a universality of compassion, as done for instance in M. de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, amounts also to suggesting that the whole world is in a soar need for it, that the whole world is a scene of all embracing misery and that life has only tragic sense. Such an

<sup>303</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. IX:11 [1171a]

<sup>304</sup> Avoiding pain is an obvious reaction and it could be used to motivate avoiding compassion which amounts to *sharing* it. The above says that, on the contrary, *sharing* does not amount to seeking pain but only to its diminishing. True compassion results always in help. Moreover, there is a difference between avoiding and escaping from, between not looking for pain and turning away in the face of it. In the latter case it is already too late and this is the case were compassion is called for. Escaping from *actually* encountered pain (of another's as much as of oneself) is like escaping from suffering which, as said in 2.§21, is a source of *alienation*.

<sup>305</sup> M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*. A:XI

exaggerated compassion, a category of *actuality* applied to the whole world, is but an exaggerated feeling which comes closer to patronising in its lack of the basic *thankfulness*. Compassion does not pity anybody nor anything, for pity hides some lack of respect, we could perhaps say, pity is compassion without respect. Compassion does not pity the tragic sense of life, the unbearable and unavoidable involvement into the evil of the world, the corruption of one's soul. It arises only in *actual* situations which call for it and, otherwise, knows that everything is a *gift*, though some of these gifts may be harder to carry than others.

131. *Concrete founding of acts* can often be expressed by an apparent *inversion*. Love, just like friendship, can point out what it perceives as mistakes or failures on the other's part. Recognising and apprehending the whole person, it may (sometimes even should) lack the unconditional acceptance of everything the other person does. Critique and disagreement is possible – in full friendship, or love, and appreciation of the person – only because the *community* is not reduced to the level of the *actual* situation and one's feelings, thoughts, acts. Only because it is *founded* in the recognition of the personal value, in the deeper *community* of values and, eventually, of the *origin*, it can judge the act without judging the person. Thus, for instance, help may take a form *I* would consider harmful, a good advice may happen to be almost an opposite of what *I* wanted to hear and expected. If *I* could anticipate it, *I* would not be in such a dear need of it, and so it would not be *such a good* advice. When *I* hear it, *I* may not understand it, *I* may not know *what* makes it a good advice; but then *I* also know *that I* should probably follow it. In many situations there will be much more friendship in saying right things which *I* do not want to hear, than in a flat acceptance of everything *I* do.
132. The *unfounded* community of mere *actuality* will often do the opposite and acclaim everything the other does, like confused parent or teacher following guidelines of all too liberal pedagogy. One feels forced to accept every *actual* wish and expression of the other because, without any deeper *foundation*, everything one is able to relate to are *actual* expressions, whether of genuine needs or of mere whims. Thus, although one still strives for a deeper *community*, one remains perplexed by the underlying absolutisation of the subject.

Without such a deeper *foundation*, ego remains a *dissociated atom*, a pure *subjectivity*, reduced to the privacy of its *actual* feelings and thoughts which – not only etymologically – amounts to privation.<sup>306</sup> *Ego* without *concrete foundation* is the archetype of *alienation*, and an image, a frequent *actual* form of that is loneliness. Loneliness is another side of privacy, a result of the other having been pressed outside the sphere of *my* privacy and reduced to a mere aspect of *my* situation, perhaps, still an active subject but not one to whom *I* have any personal relation – the other becomes a mere ‘he’. It can be an anonymous adversary in a situation where, although himself present, he functions only as a ‘third person’, a mere factor in the *actual* game. This is the way we often relate to clerks or salespersons in offices and shops, when the whole contact is reduced to an impersonal relation dictated by the *actual* context. The communication is a mere matter of routine exchange or else of gaining control over the external factors which, accidentally, can also be embodied in the other person. Exactly the same superficiality characterises communication at the cocktail-parties which have the more jolly and merry surface, the more despair and hardship is trying to hide under it. One often seeks a ‘merry company’ as a medicine against bad *mood*. In such a company, however, one does not so much *share* the good mood as is infected by it. Such a contagious, often heavy, atmosphere characterises all forms of *actuality* in which the participants, wishing for a *community*, almost force themselves to *actual share* it overcoming the felt *alienation* in the depersonalising power of a trance: a discotheque, a politically agitating meeting, an orgy, a gambling hall, a sermon of televangelist.<sup>307</sup>

Sartre's novels and plays provide extreme examples of such a *community* which is a mere multiplicity of *alienated*, mutually *external egos*. *Being and Nothingness* gives a systematic description of the absolutised *subjectivity* failing to establish any meaningful form of *community*, of the constant attempts of the conscious for-itself to turn another into an objectified and devitalised in-itself. Even love reduced for the poor man to a mere master-slave dialectic between *dissociated subjectivities* trying to subdue each other. This, of course, led nowhere as benefiting from another's submissive acts establishes perhaps dependence, but not any *communion*. And even if the other's acts are voluntary and made of good will, they do not necessarily open for me the door to

<sup>306</sup>“*Privare*” means ‘to deprive’ and “*privatus*” is it passive participle which also serves as adjective and noun.

<sup>307</sup>The classic of G. Le Bon, *The Crowd*, provides excellent descriptions of the involved mechanisms.

participation in any communion. For concrete participation requires a choice and is thoroughly active. The strongest bonds knit us not with people who did us good but with those to whom we did some good – and the bonds are the tighter, the more good we do to them. Receiving gifts or services, made of good will alone, is a much more difficult art than one commonly imagines. Genuine freedom (§§141 ff) is required to receive gifts without becoming inferior (for shamelessness can protect only against the mere *sense* of inferiority).<sup>308</sup> When such a freedom is missing, obtaining more from others is weighted only against giving more from oneself, with the resulting attempts to either subdue others or to protect oneself against them – in either case, the alienation of increasing loneliness.

At the social scale, the lack of concrete foundation results in the total anonymity which invades the threatened and alienated ego. As alienation is the loss of concreteness, so community gets now reduced to a mass of statistically anonymous individuals. The fear of anonymity is but a reflection of the missing sense of community.<sup>309</sup> The apparent medicine against it is ... success, public recognition and attention which puts a photograph in place of the lost face. This has also a deeper aspect. Dreams of exceptional achievements, of leaving one's mark for the future development, of becoming socially/politically/scientifically/...respectable, as one's own monument in one's home town – all such egotic thrills, which often indeed form the ground for outstanding achievements, are but expressions of the thirst for community which got reduced to the purely egotic hope of establishing an exceptional, even if only ephemeral case against the background of statistical mediocrity, that is, anonymity. To be different is ego's only dream, its degenerate expression of the thirst for becoming self. Although such dreams express the need to confirm uniqueness of one's ego, their second bottom is thirst for community – for the confirmation of uniqueness can for ego happen only by way of the public, ego must become a persona (in the sense of Jung), as it mistakes the common universality for its lacking concreteness and public respectability for its lacking self-respect.

The anonymous crowd, which an individual confronts instead of a meaningful community, is not a simple result of the increased numbers, of the mass pseudo-culture which flattens and deindividualises the social sphere. It is rather the other way around – the anonymous mass confronts individual who dwells exclusively at the level of his ego and, consequently, loses the concrete sense of belonging to a community.<sup>310</sup> The unfounded community at the level of actuality is an anonymous crowd.

**Communication.** Sharing the signs and actualities amounts to communication. We say “sharing” because although all signs are actual and situations are common to more people, it does not mean that every actual situation involves and every sign is a genuine communication. The unfounded communication would be a mere transfer or exchange, and not sharing, of the signs. The immediacy of signs makes them perfectly amenable to direct exchange. But communication is not an event of exchanging signs, not even of exchanging them according to some specified rules and protocols. It is not an event of exchanging any signs but of comprehending them, of recognising the shared reality through and beneath the actual signs.

Communication is a possible visible manifestation of sharing; the more we share with others, the easier and more complete is the possible communication. We do not communicate that well with bacteria or butterflies. They have quite different structure of experience; their world has few, if any, common points with ours. There is probably close to no overlap between ours and butterflies'. We communicate a bit better with cats or dogs; we and they perceive some of the same things as obstacles, we also find in them more advanced expressions of ‘feelings’ than can be found

<sup>308</sup>The custom of potlatch (M. Mauss, *The Gift*), amounting to almost destructive competition in surpassing the generosity of the received gift by the returned one, can be viewed as a social expression of the psychological dependence of the recipient. On the other extreme, there are societies where the fear of owing anything makes it almost unthinkable for an individual to receive any, especially minor, service from a stranger without immediately paying one's debt.

<sup>309</sup>We are speaking about both the anonymity of a crowd of faceless units and the anonymity of my being lost in such a crowd. The two are aspects of the same anonymity.

<sup>310</sup>We are not trying to negate the statistical prevalence of negative and alienating effects of various social diseases, like inhuman working forms, depersonalised public sphere or its spiritual emptiness. We would perhaps suggest that, to begin with, such forms are rather expressions of the egotic mentality raised to the social norm. But most importantly, alien and anonymous crowd may confront individual under any circumstances, if only the individual reduces his life project to the level of ego. Also under unfavorable social conditions (like those just mentioned), it is eventually the individual himself who has to consent to the reduction of person to ego.

in ants or butterflies. Their *experiences* cut the background along the lines sufficiently similar to ours and provide them with a lot of things which we too *distinguish* and *recognise*. So, perhaps after all, “if a lion could speak, we might understand him,”<sup>311</sup> though it certainly would not be the same degree of communication as we can achieve with any human being. And, of course, we communicate very differently with different people. “Each word means something slightly different to each person, even among those who share the same cultural background.”<sup>312</sup> This, however, in no way makes communication impossible, in fact, it is what makes it different from an exchange of information bits. We can understand words which for another mean something different because we *share* the reality to which they refer. Eventually, communication is like pointing and eventual answer to the question “What do you mean?”, after a series of clarifications and explanations, is simply “*This* is what I mean, just look *here*.” It is an event of narrowing down the *shared* horizon (of humanity, language, culture, personal experience) to the *actual* content and, by the same token, of endowing this *actuality* with meaning – the meaning of belonging to the *concrete* and *shared* horizon.

Perfect unambiguity of expressions and ultimate *precision* of the language is the domain of computer programming but whenever something is communicated, it can also, at least in principle, be misunderstood. The possibility of misunderstanding is a necessary condition of a successful communication, that is, of conveying some meaning which goes beyond the *immediacy* of the *sign*. It is only the lack of *shared* background which makes *precision* of all *signs* ultimate necessity – for where nothing is *shared* one can only exchange *signs*. As Wittgenstein observed, even an ostensive definition would be impossible without sharing enough to understand *what* the other is actually pointing at. “Whoever has seen, knows what I am saying” was a phrase used by a mystery-initiate when addressing others: perhaps, to avoid divulging secrètes but more probably because details would not help those who have not seen. We “need not be surprised if only those ideas which least belong to us can be adequately expressed in words.”<sup>313</sup> And by “adequately” one likes to mean unambiguously, precisely, excluding any possibility of misunderstanding. According to Kierkegaard, there is no direct communication, and although he too would limit this statement to the deeper truths of the genuine faith, we would extend it to all communication. For communication is conditioned by *sharing*: in its *presence*, many different *signs* or words may be used, while in its absence no words will result in communication.

This remains valid through all the levels. The most intimate communication is *founded* on the most intimate *communion*. It is only at the personal level, and only with an individual person, that full *communion* is possible and it leads to very specific ways of communicating, intensionally as well as not, most intricate aspects. But they are communicated not due to any univocal *precision*, not due to universal adequacy of the used *signs* – *signs* are here always inadequate. Just like a *symbol* may seem an almost arbitrary and accidental representation of the symbolised reality, so here too, an apparently most insignificant word, a mere look, a sheer grimace or gesture, a casual phrase, can *actually* carry the deepest meaning. It does not, however, happen because the *signs* somehow carry this meaning in them, but only because the possibility of this meaning is *shared* before it has been pointed to. The art of communication does not consist in the ability to interpret the unclear *signs* by narrowing their meaning to the most *precise* content, but rather on the contrary, in the ability to use the *actually precise signs* to grasp the *imprecise* (and often *clear*) meaning which *transcends* their *immediacy* and which they are trying to unveil.

135. Wittgenstein has often asked questions like: How can I be sure that saying “green”, I and you understand what is being said, in particular, understand the same thing? The problem is of course with ‘the same’. But this problem arises only when one is committed to some form of psychologism, to some private impressions and ideas which somehow live within one’s *subjectivity*, and which get, rather mysteriously, transferred between the monads by words like “green”. But every event of a successful communication is *founded on recognition* – the *actual* and mutual re-cognition follows only the *recognition of shared background*.

If by the meaning (of “green”) we understand some intrinsic properties, some impression or idea of greenness perceived or imagined *inside* one’s head, then indeed, it may be impossible to be sure. But ‘green’ is only a limit of *distinctions* made in *one*, made by you and me in *the same*

---

<sup>311</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. (modified)

<sup>312</sup>C. G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, eds., *Man and His Symbols*. Jung; p.28

<sup>313</sup>H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*. II

one. The limits may vary from person to person (just like Prague may end at different points for different people, just like stripes of the rainbow interpenetrate) but these variations retain a major overlap. We agree on the use of the words because we *share* the common reality and structure our experiences in similar ways. (As we said earlier, I:§35, learning a language itself contributes significantly to, but does not determine, this structuring.) In the same way, though to a much lesser degree, we agree on the use of various signs with dogs. Communication, “this influence of one monad over another is only *ideal*, and it can have its effect only through the intervention of God”<sup>293</sup>. This ‘intervention of God’ is not, however, any mystical interference of some magical power, but the fact of, at first, only ontological *foundation* in the one, of having the same *origin*, and then also of *concretely sharing* the same reality.<sup>314</sup>

One might still wonder: we agree on the use of the words, but do we agree on their meaning? “With most names, we’ve come to know which things they go together with from their use in speech, although we are unable to determine what the correct meaning or understanding of them is.”<sup>315</sup> A variant of empiricism, say “linguistic empiricism”, would attempt to reduce the latter to the former, even to replace ‘meaning’ by ‘use’. The more the mood of such a project seems different from that of behaviourism, the more surprising is the similarity of the goals and procedures. “Why is it not possible for me to doubt that I have never been on the moon? [...] But if anyone were to doubt it, how would his doubt come out in practice? And couldn’t we peacefully leave him to doubt it, since it makes no difference at all?”<sup>316</sup> We certainly could but, the absence of any observable difference in social praxis notwithstanding, could one reasonably claim that there would be no difference for the person having such doubts? The ‘difference for the person’ need not have anything to do with what the person *actually*, practically does. One can deny any such difference for the involved person only by denying the reality of the doubt, or in a more extreme case, by claiming its impossibility, perhaps, on the basis of the impossibility of the private doubt and, eventually, meanings. The linguistic empiricism tries to dissolve the phantom of the extra-linguistic meaning in the inter-subjectivity of the language usage or social praxis. But *sharing* is much more than merely obeying similar rules of social or linguistic praxis. If we did not *share* anything, how could we even agree on the consistent use of any rules? Just like *communion* requires a distance, so *sharing* some reality requires this reality to be *present*, as if independently, with all who are *sharing* it. It is only because we all *share* most of the world (practically or impractically, *actually* or not), that *actual* communication – transfer of and agreement on some meaning – is possible and may even result in new forms of experience.<sup>317</sup>

<sup>314</sup>Plotinus thus describes the souls in their intellectual dimension: “all their act must fall into place by sheer force of their nature; there can be no question of commanding or of taking counsel; they will know, each, what is to be communicated from another, by present consciousness. Even in our own case here [below], eyes often know what is not spoken; and There all is pure, every being is, as it were, an eye, nothing is concealed or sophisticated, there is no need of speech, everything is seen and known.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. IV:3.18]

<sup>315</sup>P. Abelard, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*. II:§399. Let’s only remind that in the medieval grammatical theory ‘names’ included not only nouns but also adjectives (the identification reflecting the corresponding phenomenon of the Latin language). It would be hard to imagine why, in the quoted sentence, one could not allow also verbs, adverbs, etc.

<sup>316</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. 117/120

<sup>317</sup>A vulgar analogy can be found in computer communication. The transferred bits have no significance unless they are sent and received by programs obeying some protocols which in advance determine the scope of possible communications, as if, the shared space – of use and interpretation. But even following agreed rules is not sufficient for communication beyond mere transfer of messages. It is impossible to establish so called “common knowledge” without the assumption of a prior sharing of some information. The idea is: you and I want to reach an agreement on the issue ‘*X* or *Y*?’ but so that each of us knows that we both know that we have reached it. We do not, however, share anything except some communication channels through which we can send messages (say, by post which, to simplify everything, is 100% reliable, though it does not guarantee any time of delivery – I do not know *when* you will receive nor that you have received my message, unless I obtain a confirmation from you). Suppose I prefer initially *X* and send you the message 1 : *X*. Suppose you agree. I do not know that, so you should respond, confirming 2 : *X*. Now I know that you agree with me on *X*, but you do not know that I know that. So, I have to confirm the reception of the confirmation, sending 3 : *X*. Now, you know that I know, but I do not know that you know that I know. And so on. (The scenario corresponds to theorem 6.1.1 – in R. Fagin *et al.*, *Reasoning about Knowledge* – which precludes the possibility of achieving common knowledge of anything having been delivered. Stronger versions, e.g., theorem 4.5.4, apply to slightly modified situations where *no* common knowledge may arise, as a consequence of complete asynchrony of the components.) Misusing such arguments for our purposes, we could say that in the absence of initial sharing, it is not possible to establish it either, even in the presence of most reliable communication, understood as mere transfer of messages (whether mere bits, pictures, ‘mental’ meanings or deepest ideas). Technically, one reaches the fix-point of the appropriate functional (where everybody knows that everybody knows that everybody knows that...) only as the infinite limit which, misinterpreted in practical terms,

"If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either."<sup>318</sup> Allow us to reformulate it as follows: If you do not recognise any *distinctions*, the mere words and their exchange will not teach you that either. Every expression draws some boundary, either a boundary which, to some degree, already was there (as in descriptions or clarifications) or one which appears only with this expression (as in speech acts). The *meaning* arises between the *actual* utterance/reading of the expression and the background which acquires a determination. The meaning of a statement, or any word, is not *subjective* because to be meaning it must *transcend* the mere *immediacy* of the sign. It is not private either because, at least in principle, *I am* never the only person able to recognise it. And this is the case because all boundaries are drawn in the *shared* reality, eventually, in the *indistinct* background of the one.

But *I* may have doubts which have no consequences for others (nor, in practical matters, even for me), *I* may go around meaning something which *I* never manage to communicate to others, *I* may spend half, even the whole, life intending something which *I* never manage to express. If this were impossible, communication would be impossible also, or else, communication would not be a reflection of genuine *sharing*, would not be a conveyance of meanings but a mere exchange of labels, a mere transfer of *signs*.

136. Just like the *concretely founded* communication rests on the eventual sense of *sharing* and conveys it through and underneath everything it *actually* communicates, the *unfounded* communication is determined by its lack, that is, the constant fear of failure. *Sharing* is reduced to universality and any possible meaning to its *visible* expression. One searches for some *actual* and common basis which, as we learn from many attempts, it is impossible to circumscribe *concretely*, let alone *precisely* specify.

The *idol* of 'rational argumentation' may serve as a common example. Trying to convince oneself and others that we are all first of all rational beings (whatever that means), one postulates then some ideal goal of rational morality consisting in the unreserved acceptance of rational arguments. One may even insist that it recognises the dignity of humans paying all due respect to their value – which happens to be the same as the value of their rationality.

Let us ignore the fact that there is hardly anything, hardly any action or attitude, which could not be supported by plausible arguments. In some contexts (of which the academia may serve as the paramount example), openness to other's arguments is certainly a matter of professional ethics. In life, one can also occasionally learn something from listening to other's arguments. But when raised to the level of the fundamental principle it becomes a caricature of genuine communication. Have you ever been convinced by an argument? That is, convinced not in some petty matter of this or that, not in the common attempts to come up with a solution to some problem, but in a matter of significance, in a matter which you recognise as having existential relevance. If one believes in God, is it because of an argument? If one does not, is it because of an argument? Doubtful, very doubtful. In this last case, it may rather be because one does not find any argument, and rests satisfied with one's 'rationality'. But there are no forcing arguments, or rather, no sufficient reasons; at best, there are only clarifications of meanings, accounts of experience. When arguments are applied beyond the sphere of precisely defined, *actual* problems, they either become an intellectual game or, when taken seriously, boil down to one thing: "Either you are stupid since you do not see that this is right, or else you are respectably rational and accept it." Argumentation and persuasion, when taken to the extreme, that is, when absolutised are much closer to brute force than they are willing to admit.<sup>319</sup> Appeals to some 'ideals', like 'communicative reason and rationality', 'undisturbed rational communication', 'tolerance', 'solidarity', etc., are unable to cover up the underlying disrespect for the human being – for the *whole* human being. The calls

---

means that it is unreachable. In short, if we do not initially share knowledge, the mere exchange of messages will never lead to achieving common knowledge. But common knowledge of agreement arises trivially if we, for instance, share the same location and both point at the *X* (observing each other's action) or, as is usually the case, when we speak directly to each other. In the above example, if we initially shared the knowledge that each message is in fact delivered after, say, 1 minute, then 1 minute after I sent 1 : *X* we would achieve common knowledge of *X*.

<sup>318</sup>L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. 114

<sup>319</sup>We won't mention those who see in liberal democracy 'the best political system' known from history since it appeals to arguments and not force. How can one call the majority vote, where a vote of a professor counts as much as that of a farmer, argumentation? How can one compare shows of political sophistry and demagogic, or for that matter advertisement's stupidity, to argumentative discourse? Well, perhaps one can because they are not so ...totally different? Blindness can be hard to distinguish from confusion. Did not Hegel, the incarnated spirit of reason, make similar claims about the highest possible perfection of the Prussian state in *his* time?

to assuming a respectful attitude towards the opponents become necessary, because it has to be added on the top of all the arguments, like a meek tablecloth covering a dirty table.

A different example can be that of groups establishing and requiring the use of secret codes. Establishing private codes of communication – words, gestures, expressions which carry the full meaning only to those initiated in the community – is characteristic for lovers and close friends. But their privacy is different from secrecy. In the extreme cases of secret organisations such codes are established for the purpose of hiding the secrets as well as for the confirmation of the identity of the community and its members. Secret initiation rites, secret rituals follow the clandestine operations and hidden purposes. In many situations, secrecy may be understandable and even justified (as, for instance, in the cases of organisations opposing aggression, political oppression and the like) or less so (as in the case of criminal organisations or mere fear of openness). But in either case, the secrecy of the codes signals the broken *community*, the impossibility or unwillingness to openly found the communication across the social, political or even personal division lines.

Secret codes, being codes, insist on the strictness of the rules – the unambiguity of the greeting sign, the rigidity of the ceremony, the impossibility of deviation from the predetermined sequence of acts or formulae.<sup>320</sup> The less or the shallower is the meaning to communicate, the greater the need for rigid rules, for their precision is the last thing which may give an impression of inter-subjectivity, of sharing anything with the others – provided they follow the same rules! Sick cases are extreme examples of such a reduction to the level of egotic actuality where the ability to follow sequences of sterile and precise signs seems the last residual of communication. Clang associations (“real, seal, deal, heel”) or irrelevant, though possible, associations (a person sending a new year’s greetings and wishing another a fruitful year, ends with the wishes of good apple-year and pear-year, and then sauerkraut, and cabbage year...); difficulties with abstract reasoning and the resulting literal/specific interpretations (e.g., the proverb “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” gets commented: “If you are able to catch a bird you might be able to sell him for money.”) – all such symptoms of schizophrenia are also expressions of the communication which gets disturbed by the rigidity of following plain rules in use of the involved signs.<sup>321</sup> The disturbance is not the lack of a rule but the lack of anything but the rule; it is not the lack of any meaning but the fact that the whole meaning is only the mere fact of conforming to some rule, that the content of the actually followed rule is the only discernible content of the message. Even more extreme example of a similar rule-rigidity is a correct but impersonally stiff language which is spoken too perfectly and too grammatically, as if by a person using a foreign language he learned in a classroom; the lack of colloquiality and subtleties of emotional tone; the adequate knowledge and application of the formal rules of the language along with the complete lack of the idea of communication. These defects, extending also to nonverbal communication, characterise some forms of autism.

One thing is the study of languages, of their properties and structures; quite another is the obsession with Language. Proliferation of the disciplines and intense investigations in linguistics, semiotics, logic, grammar, parsing, machine translation, etc., etc., can certainly prove to be invaluable. But they gain paramount relevance for a philosopher primarily when he has lost – or sees the loss of – the sense of any *community*. Language can be interesting in most circumstances. But it is becoming almost imperatively important when it ceases to function properly, that is, when its foundation, the *community* which makes communication possible, deteriorates, when the distance to the shared reality becomes impassable because that which is shared gets reduced to that which is common and the clear meanings which might be communicated to the precise means of communication. All that one is still able to hope for is actual agreement, adequacy of the signs, consensus concerning the rules. Fiddling with the language one hopes to improve the actual communication and thus, perhaps, to reestablish the *community*. But the more intense and precise are the determinations of all the visible signs, the more all the sense of *community* disappears in the empty cracks between them.<sup>322</sup>

<sup>320</sup>Rituals can be, of course, truly symbolic expressions of invisible meanings, but the problem is that they are not always so, and we are now speaking about the cases when they are not.

<sup>321</sup>Of course, other psycho-somatic disturbances are possible, but they do not concern us here.

<sup>322</sup>We would not claim any causal relations, but observing merely some rough simultaneities is too tempting, even if also too daring. (1) Some parallels to such a coupling of linguisticism and the lack of *community* might be discerned in Europe in the VII-th and VIII-th century: on the one hand, the final stages of the disappearance of the Roman culture, the gradual dissolution of the Merovingian empire, conflicts between the majordomos for

139. 1. At the lowest level of *immediate experiences*, *communion* amounts to *sharing* the actual moments. With whom? It may be the loved person, or else people who happen to be present. But it need not be anybody in particular, nobody may be *actually* present. *Thankfulness* is *sharing* through *participation*, and every moment, even if lived in loneliness, is but a *gift* of the *transcendence*. Recognition of this *gift* in a single moment is the same as *sharing* it with others – whether *actually* present or not. It is *sharing* with others because the *gift*, although given to me, is not *mine*, is not given *only* to me.

Although *immediacy* does not seem to leave the space for any *distance*, the concrete communion of a moment respects both the *distance* to the *origin* of the *gift* and to the other with whom it is *shared*. Other, in particular, requires a *distance*. This platitude seems to be forgotten quite often, so let us repeat – only *distance* makes otherness possible. The ultimate otherness is constituted by the ultimate *confrontation* (which is a form of *distance*). But so is another person – he emerges as another only through and from the *distance* which separates us. Only distance makes relation possible, and only distance makes being-together possible. The true *communion* can find an expression in the *immediacy* of a pure ‘now’ only if the *distance* is honestly and carefully maintained. The sense and perhaps even the feeling of unity in and of a moment is possible only when the aspect of the *distance* is retained, when one remembers that it is unity of distinct poles, when we join each other from the *distance* of distinct individualities. In fact, keeping the trace of this *distance* in an *actual* moment is itself enough to experience the unity – at once, of *sharing* this very moment *and* of *sharing* its *origin*. This *distance* and otherness, present in the *immediacy* of a moment which apparently makes it impossible, is the *trace* of the *concretely founded communion*.

Expressions of this are as varied as moments one may encounter. Let us say, it can be for instance respect for things in the *immediate vicinity*, within the horizon of our acts. The care we take for things is not grounded in our infinite love for their *absolute* value, but in our love for them as *concrete gifts* of the *origin*; it is love in *analogical* sense, love which is but an *expression* of *communion*. As always, telling one from another, telling such a love from *idolatry*, is not a matter of any rules and laws, but of *concrete*, personal presence. What is the ultimate good of this or that thing? Fortunately, there is no general answer, because if there were, our lives would be pretty boring. Petting a cat or watering a plant can hardly be anything evil, but it may be an expression of a quiet pleasure or respectful care or, on the other hand, of a nagging doubt about one’s likability or usefulness. In the former case the moment is *shared* and in the latter stolen.

140. Exclusive restriction to the level of *immediacy* is hardly possible. Lack of *concrete foundation* leaves then hardly any possibility of *sharing* anything. Things and *objects* viewed from this level appear as arbitrary events of pure *immediacy*. Consequently, all kinds of relations between them, as well as between them and the *subject*, are as if purely nominal, unreal, abstract, indifferent. Appropriation and minute enjoyment can be attempts to establish some *immediate community*.

---

the succession after once powerful dynasty; and on the other hand, the conviction that the nature of things are recognisable in the etymology of their names underlying the whole of Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*; Fridugisus' linguistic arguments for the existence of nothingness (cf. footnote 234, p. 81); Alkuin's minuscule and struggle against barbarian, germanized Latin; dealing at the same time with the nature of things and the properties of their names in the encyclopedia of Hrabanus Maurus, *De universo*. (Even if the two last ones belong to the Carolinian renaissance, they can be seen as continuators of the linguistic line.) (2) Around the beginning of the XII-th century, the new money economy and the Gregorian reforms began to yield the divisive and destabilising consequences. The reforms attacking the simony among the clerics opened up, as was claimed, for the emergence and proliferation of the heretical movements, almost absent since the V-th century. (Their appearance around that time does not, of course, reduce to the effects of Gregorianism.) At the same time, the increasing interest in language and the study of its foundations develop into the Scholastic grammar with its theory of supposition and, eventually, into Ockham's nominalism vindicating language and logic to the level of ultimate truth-bearers, along with the atomistic ontology. (3) The social disintegration of the XX-th century hardly needs any comments. It is paralleled by the fascination with the philosophy of language, also emergence of formal languages and logic, and the thread leading through logical positivism to analytical philosophy which ends... where it ends. Perhaps, the ecstatic opening to ‘otherness’, just like the personal spiritualism of the New Age (both with roots reaching at least to the end of the XIX-th century), could be seen as a reaction against the stiffened linguisticism and predilections for rigid formalities. The associated cacophony of language looks like a culmination of a century long analytical attempts to heal its metaphysical sickness by... capturing and formalising its essence. Dare we to consider it as yet another analogy? Namely, as a similarity to the post XII-th century heresies (especially Wyclif's but also, at least to some degree, most contestations of the time) which postulated replacing the visible, stiff and degenerate Church and tradition by the invisible and living church, the true community founded directly and exclusively on the revelation of the absolute ‘otherness’ – Bible?

'Use-and-throw' attitudes, 'things are for *me* and *I* do what *I* want with them', all forms of disrespectful arrogance acting from the impulse of the moment are *immediate* expressions of the *unfounded community*, that is, of the lack of *community*.

In terms of relations between people, this lack of *foundation* amounts to extreme atomicity, to positing every individual as a totally independent 'it', dissociated from any context and influences from 'outside'. The other who has thus become a mere 'it' can be encounter just like other things. Everybody may have his private goals and life, but these are not in any way shared which means, other's life in no way affects mine. "All creatures are born isolated and have no need of one another."<sup>95</sup>

## Freedom

4. We have said in §49 that freedom is an aspect of pride. This certainly needs some qualifications. 141. We are dependent on various things, we have to eat and sleep, etc. We are involved into causal relations of *this world* but ... it in no way contradicts our freedom. For freedom is not freedom 'from' every possible form of dependence but only from enslavement. Freedom which tries to establish itself as a total independence 'from' everything, ends up in the blind street of other self-referential paradoxes by realising that it is sentenced to freedom – having proved (to itself) its independence, it cannot escape 'from' this very fact, it becomes doomed to this fact.<sup>323</sup> The attempt to rise above, to liberate *oneself* 'from' every possible dependence is exactly an aspect of pride for which every dependence seems a form of slavery. But finding only emptiness above the interplay of *visible* dependencies, the only project that remains is to keep liberating 'from' this, 'from' that, 'from'... It is this negative freedom 'from', the insatiable freedom of emptiness which is an aspect of pride.

Liberating oneself 'from' this and 'from' that has also the aspect of paying back one's debts. Having borrowed or obtained something makes me feel unfree and settling the accounts I liberate myself 'from' that. Man who owes nothing to anybody stays cool and free, above the pettiness of daily debts, he remains remote, unaffected and ... *proud*. But freedom is not at all to pay back all the debts – this is simply impossible, and *thankfulness* amounts also to the recognition of one's infinite debt. The freer one is the more one owes, and *nothingness*, owning *nothing*, owes everything.

On the other hand, some like to remember the unhappy events and days of childhood, complaining about the family and relatives who did not do their due... About the society which did not and does not function to promote personal happiness... About others, met then and now, who take away one's spare time, money, possibilities of enjoyment, one's life. So one offers one's time and energy and imagines that others owe him something. All such complains can seem justified but their only work is: enslavement. Nobody, and least of all the past, owes anything to a free man.

There is the abyss of freedom, the abyss of *nothingness* which attracts a slave with the indeterminacy of its emptiness, like a false promise. The dread of this terrifying attraction is the price of the freedom which, equated with emptiness, proves illusory. The true, *absolute* freedom is not only to possess nothing but also to owe everything. It is equivalent to a surrender, to renouncing *oneself*, that is, renouncing all claims one might believe to have, all debts others might possibly owe. It is the freedom to accept the undeserved *gift*, to recognise the *absolute* character of the *command*, which in particular means, the possibility one has to deny it. Having accepted it, the complete lack of *actual* contents leaves one entirely free to realise it, to give it an adequate *actual* form. (What form is adequate, however, is too *concrete* a question to be addressed in such abstract categories.) "God forces no one, for love cannot compel, and God's service, therefore, is a thing of perfect freedom."<sup>324</sup> 142.

This freedom to express the *invisible*, this presence of *transcendence* in the midst of *immanence*, is thus not *my* freedom. As all dimensions of the *absolute* it simply is, or is not at all, and *I* can at most *participate* in it. To be free is to *forget* one's freedom. (Let us only remind that *forgetfulness* is not the same as denial, a mere slipping out of memory or simple blindness, §101.) The Yes,

<sup>323</sup>The destructive character of such an observation relies on the combination of both the negative freedom 'from' and the attempts to *prove* it as an unavoidable truth. But the two easily go together.

<sup>324</sup>Hans Denk [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*. p.93]

suspending the presumed *absoluteness* of *this world* and anchoring *my* being above it, makes me completely free in relation to it. This freedom is precisely the content of *non-attachment*, of erasing the dependence on the *idols*, the *visible* pretenders to *absoluteness*. It *finds* the thorough experience of freedom which permeates *my* whole being, and which is not contradicted by any problems, obstacles, restrictions at the lower levels. In a sense, it liberates one from the dependence on the *visible world* simply by abolishing the need to look for the final proofs and ultimate confirmations of freedom there.

This is yet another example of *inversion*: just like the Yes to Godhead turns out to be the deepest Yes to *this world*, so the *humility* and submission to the higher *commands* is the fullest form of freedom. Freedom is not any ‘faculty’, any separate, empty power which could be filled with arbitrary contents, and which, by some universal law of human nature, every soul either possesses or not. It is an aspect of the universal possibility, which everyone may desire or detest, attempt to achieve or neglect, pray for or forget.

143. 3. *I* cherish *my* dreams, *my* images – of happiness, fulfillment, completeness – and stay attached to these *idols* in constant attempts to find an *actual* medicine against the *thirst*. One will say, OK, but these are *my* images and dreams, and as such they make *me* free from the external constraints. There may be some psychological truth in that, but of little value. For it only posits this image in order to liberate itself ‘from’ that, it tries to perform the impossible leap and get rid of the *externality* which is only an aspect of its very *subjectivity*. This may be a common image of freedom at the level of *mineness*, of *unfounded* freedom which sticking to some *visible idols* is at the same time trying to escape ‘from’ any such dependency.

*My* freedom, the *unfounded* freedom of this level, focusing on *mineness* insists on making one’s own choices, on following one’s own course of actions, on being an authentic *Dasein*, or else an independent *Übermensch*. But *mineness*, which has divided the world into *mine* and *not-mine*, is exactly the site of the negative freedom ‘from’, independence ‘from...’<sup>325</sup> Insisting on the independence ‘from’ whatever is not *mine*, what has not been freely chosen by *me*, it can only encounter deeper and deeper ‘certitude of abyss’. As it often happens in the face of ultimate emptiness, this negative freedom turns around to seek solace in the things of *this world* and one can indeed “ask the question if man, following the need of psychological and metaphysical bonds, does not prefer dread over freedom.”<sup>326</sup> For dread remains only as long as one is staying at a distance and does not plunge into the abyss. Thus dread, real as it is, is only a new *idol* worshiped for its being so deeply *mine* and allowing *me* to remain what I was. Balancing on this edge between freedom ‘from’ this world and dread in its face is the epitome of loneliness and alienation. “You are and ... nobody cares” is the eventual truth of this state and this ‘freedom’, so thoroughly described in existentialist literature that it hardly needs more words.

144. *I* cherish the dreams and images – of happiness, fulfillment, completeness – but all these dreams are like a mist, vague and unclear, in fact, entirely contentless, sheer ghosts. What do you dream of when you dream of happiness? Do you ever *dream* of happiness? A dream seems to require an image, so perhaps you manage to substitute this or that, but then you also immediately start to suspect that it does not exhaust the meaning of your dream.

The deepest dreams *manifest thirst*, they aim at the *nexus* of Yes, and so can be falsified by any attempt to bring them to the level of all too precise. Every image threatens with a reduction of meaning and if it is not kept at the appropriate *distance*, required by its origin, it becomes a pretension or entitlement. For we are all entitled to happiness, and since *this* is happiness (for *me!*), *I* should be entitled to *this*. Then *I* get this and so *I* should be happy, but *I* am still not. Or, perhaps, *I* am eventually happy but then *I* am not ... free. And what is happiness good for, if one is not free? But everybody is entitled to freedom, right? (human right!) so now, what does it mean to be free?

Wrong questions breed wrong *distinctions*. The mist of happiness, the ghost of fulfillment for which we thirst, is not different from freedom. They are but aspects of the same *nexus*. Speaking more specifically, we can say that freedom at the level of *mineness* is *non-attachment*, is freedom

<sup>325</sup>We are, of course, simplifying tremendously all the references here. For instance, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is supposed to act from the pure positivity of his own, vital energy. But it is still *his own* and the main emphasis lies on independence, on ‘not being concerned with others’ which, somehow, remains bothered by others being there. Every call to liberation and independence witnesses to enslavement.

<sup>326</sup>T. Mann, *My Times*.

from the slavery to *idols*, be they images, things or ideas, or else empty words which despair endows with ever more precise meanings – they are all gathered under the *idol of mineness*. Its ultimate and typical expression is confusion of freedom with *my* sense of being free, of freedom with *my* feeling of freedom. Thus *attachment* trying to realise its freedom only engrosses itself into unfreedom. Freedom, *non-attachment*, is the total non-entitlement, which is the same as the lack of fear, that is, openness for every *gift*. And thus freedom is unbreakably bound with meaningfulness which is exactly the *concrete presence*, *openness to vertical transcendence* and *thankfulness* for its gifts. The lack of meaning is also the lack of freedom, just like is the lack of respect.

2. Freedom as total independence ‘from’ causal relations of *this world* is an invention of *attachment*, 145. of *attachment* to *this world* which tries to detach itself from it, which tries to liberate itself by rising above it and . . . still stays in *this world*, because above it, it finds only emptiness. Causality, this much overemphasized notion, and more significantly the physical existence, the body, the physiology, in short, the whole sphere of most *actualised* contents, does not in the slightest oppose the freedom because they belong to different levels of *existence*. But *attachment*, reducing all that is to what is *visible*, can not but oppose the two; for it, if there is any freedom, it must be found exclusively within the sphere of *visibility*.

This involves reflection over freedom into the opposition to determinism. The *objective* world of complexes is rational and understandable, which eventually means, underlined necessary laws. The celebrated problems of free will emerge as a result of reducing human *existence* to the same level and considering it only in terms of the *objective complex* and natural laws. By the same token, the will gets degraded to the egotic ability of freely selecting goals among the *objects*, *complexes* and constellations of the world. In this tradition even predestination acquires a form of determination and one has to take recourse to various distinctions like, for instance, between necessity of all events when seen from the point of divine knowledge vs. their occurrence through free will when seen in their own nature by human understanding (Boethius),<sup>327</sup> a related distinction of Leibniz’ between the absolute necessity (whose opposite would involve a contradiction) and the hypothetical one (which rests on God’s foreknowledge and free decision and corresponds, as a matter of fact, to the contingent events of our world), the distinction borrowed from Stoics by Spinoza between free acceptance of the laws vs. unfree because unproductive opposition to them.<sup>328</sup> Necessity and determinism is the ultimately objectified image of our limitations, is the fact that nobody possesses unlimited power enabling him to ‘do as he wishes’, pushed to the ideal limit. And like every ideal limit, it loses contact with the *concreteness* of *existence* and becomes only the more troubling and apparently more important, the less relevance it retains. In fact, necessary and inviolable laws would need no observance – this is the essence of their necessity. So confronted with them, the only remnants of free choice would be between 1) rejection and denial, in a childish opposition to the unavoidable, or 2) resolute acceptance and obedience. As rejection of the unavoidable is irrational, true freedom must then amount to expedient use of the laws, to the ability to manipulate and apply them. It is freedom which liberates ‘from’ the necessities of *this world* only when these can be utilised for one’s own purposes. However, the more necessity, the less content and, eventually, such laws which might be believed to apply unreservedly, get applicable only to more and more precise and objectified contents, II:§§232ff. In a practical context, this is the way in which money and power give freedom of choice and action, freedom which, mixed with and constantly opposed to the limitations imposed by the surroundings, keeps fighting for its own sake and, at the same

<sup>327</sup>This makes, in fact, deterministic necessity into a mere phantom since it becomes merely a property of divine knowledge without any influence on and relevance to human life. Everything happens as if there were no necessity, for God foreknows simply the results of free choices which, in temporal terms, remain undetermined until they are actually made: “if Providence sees an event in its present, that thing must be, though it has no necessity of its own nature. And God looks in His present upon those future things which come to pass through free will. Therefore if these things be looked at from the point of view of God’s insight, they come to pass of necessity under the condition of divine knowledge; if, on the other hand, they are viewed by themselves, they do not lose the perfect freedom of their nature. Without doubt, then, all things that God foreknows do come to pass, but some of them proceed from free will; [...] if they are viewed by themselves, they are perfectly free from all ties of necessity.” [Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, V]

<sup>328</sup>Here, one makes any indeterminacy and freedom a mere illusion. Stoics used the following illustration: “If a dog which wanted to follow the cart were bound to it, then it would both go and be dragged after the cart, doing voluntarily what it must do of necessity; but if it did not want to follow the cart, it would still be forced to do it anyway. The same happens to the humans.” [after W. Szczerba, *The Concept of Eternal Return*....p.76, footnote 185; Hipolit [my retranslation]]

time, doubts its ultimate *foundation*. For overcoming various *actual* limitations, it suspects some fundamental one, but not finding any *visible* necessity, it can avoid the ultimate emptiness only by pushing the idea of necessity further and further away from itself.

146. The problem of freedom and free will is usually posed in the manner of an *objective* question about some ‘matter at hand’: “*Are we or are we not free?*” “*Is our will free or is it not?*” Also such questions lead naturally to what one would consider the ‘real’: the physical world, causality, the natural laws – these give at least a context for speaking about that which ‘is’, and ‘from’ which one might be free. But such questions have only wrong answers. If one says no, all common-sense objects forcefully, if not scholarly. But if one answers yes, gives reasons and arguments showing that, indeed, we *are* free, then one gets immediately captured into the necessity of this answer which makes one unfree with respect to the (now necessary) law of freedom. However, freedom is not any fact but an *existential* possibility, it is not given, it is not something everybody has or, as the case may be, does not have.

We have, perhaps, liberated ourselves from this mode of speaking, but still, do we not hear, occasionally, talk about the ‘problem of free will’? It can, indeed, be made into a tremendous problem. Here *I am*, in *this world*, determined by the laws of nature, and yet *I can choose to do this or that*, *I do have a definite feeling that I have free will*. But do *I*? How is it possible in the world, of which *I am* a part, which is just a clockwork. OK, we do not believe in this clockwork any more. A stone which hypothetically thinks that it is endeavoring to further its motion as much as it can, a compass needle which desires to move north and opines that it turns itself independently of another cause, or that dog of Stoics which, desiring to follow the cart, was also bound to it so that it followed it both voluntarily and under compulsion – these images do not exercise such a strong influence on our sense of relevance, because the underlying idea of an inescapable mechanism is not so convincing any more. We do not believe in this clockwork any more but we haven’t got anything else to believe in instead. Although we, everybody with *his will*, are no longer confronted by (an image of) a deterministic clockwork, the doubts concerning freedom seem to persist. The world, perhaps, is a bit more indeterminate than a clockwork, but the question still remains: *am I free?*

Reduced to the level of *actuality*, freedom becomes only freedom to choose one course of *action* rather than another – one asks if the choice is made freely, if the will is free. Will is *mine*, it is something *I have*, not something *I am*; that is, it is an *aspect* of ego, in fact, the fundamental aspect emphasized always by every egotic being or culture. As ego, so also will is involved into the interplay of all *visible distinctions*, and all possible relations between them. Trying to liberate itself ‘from’ the *visible* laws of the *visible world*, it has only emptiness of indeterminacy and arbitrary choice left. But replacing natural, perhaps even necessary laws by some stochastic processes, by indeterminate laws of social interactions, by Heisenberg’s principle, does not change the least thing, no matter how much one would like to believe that indeterminacy of the world is more pleasing to *my* freedom than its necessity would be. Meaninglessness is an aspect of unfreedom and increasing the indeterminacy of things does rather the opposite than what one would like to believe. It is doubtful if anybody reading Camus, Beckett or Sartre is able to discern any sense of freedom, of genuine freedom. Their free will chooses perhaps freely, that is arbitrarily, but it also seems strangely unfree, captured somewhere between *nausea* and Sisyphean heaviness. Identifying freedom with the freedom of choices amounts to a tremendous reduction of the idea to the momentaneous quality of a single *act*. The shadow of arbitrariness, which always appears in the background of such discussion, is only to be expected. Do we really want to reduce freedom to such *actual* choices? Any *actual* decision concerns only more or less petty matters, and the more we insist on deciding *ourselves*, the pettier we become. Is *our* freedom the freedom to decide whether we will have an ice-cream or a chocolate? Is this freedom we want to speak about? Is this freedom? The issue is not to decide oneself but to decide rightly, and freedom of choice has close to nothing to do with that.

Free choice of free will might seem to ensure that *my* ego manages to detach itself from *this world*. Perhaps. But detachment is only a form (*inversion*) of attachment, a despair capable of nothing more than negation.<sup>329</sup> In fact, *I* would probably feel much more unfree in a completely

---

<sup>329</sup>This is the constant association of the theme of freedom and liberation from this world with the variants of detachment and abnegation, whether in the original Orphic and Platonic, then Manichean, Gnostic and Cathar type, or more modern kinds, of which Heidegger and later existentialists are the prime example. Shestov’s aggressive

chaotic world, facing the ‘certitude of the abyss’, than in the world of Newton, or even Laplace. Such a world, fully determined by causality (or other law), is only an image and freedom does not amount to overcoming causality or other possible determinations of our *acts*. Various acts in various situations may be performed under various coercing factors. In fact, “[n]o one wills what he can will because he can, without some other cause [...]”<sup>330</sup> But this does not change the fact that most important human acts have no discernible, *visible* causes – for causality, as Kant teaches, is a category of mere *actuality*. (This does not mean that acts are indeterminate and arbitrary – they may not be caused, but they are almost always *motivated*.) *Experience* of a free (that is, *motivated*, and not arbitrary) choice is irrefutable, and so determinism must ignore experience and appeal to some ‘deeper’ aspects, possible theories, splashy images, hidden mechanisms, future investigations... Consequently, possible perhaps as it in principle might be, it remains since millennia a mere postulate – the postulate to figure out all the sufficient and determining causes.

Non-attachment is freedom from attachment but it is not freedom ‘from’ *this world*. On the 147. contrary, it is precisely freedom to live and act *in this world*. Actual freedom is not liberation ‘from’ things and their order but respect for them, that is *thankful* acceptance.

Because *I* no longer value any of the *visible* things as *absolutes*, that is, *I* do not expect them to quench the *thirst*, *I* can accept them, whether they are one way or another. Accepting things is very different from surrendering to them. Acceptance means here the same as respect. *I* do not require explanations and *I* do not require reasons or arguments which is precisely to say: *I* respect them. They run their course, they may have their logic and it may be highly rewarding to study their ways and to inquire into (not require) their reasons. My freedom is the freedom to do this. Arranging them according to *my* wishes and likings are but petty consequences which may be useful but which have nothing to do with my freedom. Freedom, true freedom, is freedom to respect ‘the order of things’, for “no Thing is contrary to God; no creature nor creature’s work, nor anything that we can name or think of is contrary to God or displeasing to Him, but only disobedience and the disobedient man.”<sup>112</sup>

Disobedience is but another word for attachment; attachment which worships instead of respecting, and thus remains enslaved in the midst of its search for liberation. Just like one *actuality* excludes another, so one *idol* opposes and tries to avoid or defeat another. Any attempt to escape from this or that, and the eventual form of the attempt to liberate *oneself* ‘from’ the whole order of things and *this world*, is an expression of attachment, of an involvement which makes *this world* the only reference frame, of the underlying feeling of enslavement which sees its only alternative in negation, in detachment. ‘Use-and-throw’ attitudes, ‘things are for *me* and *I* do what *I* want with them’, all forms of disrespectful arrogance are expressions of un-freedom (just as they were expressions of the lacking communion in §140). Also, an inverted attitude, the stoically resigned ‘acceptance of the world’, the realisation that *I* can not oppose ‘the whole world’ and that therefore it is wiser not to fight against it but humbly accept whatever it brings *me*, is an expression not of freedom and wisdom but of defeat and surrender. It may look like respect but, typically, it will be a mere servility, a mere observance of all rules, regulations, customs. Although there is nothing wrong with all that in itself, it often carries at its bottom the feeling of unfreedom when it is a mere *act* within *this world*, a mere defeat in the face of *visibility*, that is, when it is not concretely founded in the higher freedom.

1. Freedom viewed from the level of *unfounded immediacy* is hardly anything more than arbitrariness of appearances. This seems to be the character freedom acquires in some forms of idealism, for instance in Fichte’s Ego, and it is quite explicit in Sartrean ‘for-itself’. The ideal *immediacy* of an equally ideal *subject* leaves no room for anything except spontaneous production, positing, apperception, appearance of arbitrary contents. The only alternative, in which thinking such *immediacy* inevitably gets itself involved, is between the contents being posited by the *subject* or else being completely independent from it. Even the laboriously reworked by the categories of understanding contents of Kantian sensations are, eventually, arbitrary elements confronting the *subject* occupied with its transcendental – and atemporal only because momentaneous – activities. The sense of freedom, whether on the side of the *subject* or *object*, is just the spontaneous emergence of contents. It is but a reflection of the *reflective act* which, dissociating its *object* from 148.

---

opposition of Jerusalem’s faith to the reason of Athens’ would also fall into this category.

<sup>330</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *On the Fall of the Devil*. 27

itself and from all the rest, posits it in the ‘freedom’ of arbitrariness.<sup>331</sup>

Some original feelings which might be related to such an idealised perspective would present me with the *actual* situation as absolutely indeterminate. The world seen as a chaotic collection of isolated entities, as a pure play not even of chance but of arbitrariness, the alien and alienated world to which one nevertheless still feels some form of belonging and which one would like to see in an attractive, positive manner, in short, a deep existential crisis, may lead to such a perception of freedom. One day man will go mad to prove that he is free – as Dostoevsky prophesied.<sup>332</sup> Mad minuteness is only a step from minute madness which collapses the whole world to *immediate* proximity. Arbitrary spontaneity of such an isolated moment is the last resort of apparent freedom left to a slave who had to escape that far.

The arbitrariness of all the events and complete lack of control over them provide the grounds for denying that they have any value, that bad is as good – since equally arbitrary – as good, that my only role is to confront and accept whatever is encountered. Let this description not mislead us – it might almost apply to the attitude of *thankful* acceptance. The difference is that arbitrariness levels and equates all things because they have lost all meaning and become equally empty, while *thankfulness* accepts all things still differentiating and even choosing between them. As most thinkers, not only of the rational school, always maintained, freedom requires a rational element – it is not an arbitrary choice (which is only the other side of meaninglessness) but one *concretely founded* in a higher sphere of reasons or *motivations*.

149. Freedom, *founded* freedom of any *act* is *rest*, is its anchoring in *all* the higher levels of being. An *act* of will is still only an *act*, and the sense of its freedom amounts to the degree of its *dissociation* ‘from’ the causal dependencies which, eventually, means simply the degree of its *dissociation*. But the constitutive quality of an *act* is its very limitation to the *horizon of actuality*, its *dissociation*. Thus every *act* carries with it this sense of freedom. This sense, however, has no direct implications for the freedom of the *act* which is almost its exact *inversion*: the *concrete* anchoring in the *transcendence* as opposed to a *dissociation* from it. There is no such thing as a ‘*free act in itself*’, for a free *act* is simply an *act* of a free person, an *act founded concretely* in the freedom of *existence*.

In one of the most cruel situations of enslavement, when ten prisoners are selected to be tortured to death for the absence of one person at the roll call, a lucky, unchosen man steps forth and asks to change the places with one of the selected men. Thus Maksymilian Kolbe died in Auschwitz, while the man whose life he saved survived the war. No situation deprives man completely of the possibility to choose, that is, to act. The situation in which one, say, has to lie or be killed may not have been chosen voluntarily, yet the choice of the alternatives remains. “Therefore although he either lies or is killed unwillingly, it does not follow that he lies unwillingly or is killed unwillingly.”<sup>333</sup> All too elaborate comments on the choice of Kolbe’s would be inappropriate but a few words should be allowed. It may serve as an example of an *act* of ultimate freedom and, by allowing also others to retain the faith in its possibility, of liberation. If we were to call it an “*act of being-towards-death*”, we would have to emphasize that it is not any ‘directedness’ towards death and nothingness, cherished for their liberating ultimacy, but only preparedness for death, a true sacrifice choosing something one does not want, and choosing it in the name of something which transcends infinitely any *actual* aspect of the situation.<sup>334</sup> Freedom of such an *act* is anchored in the knowledge of its extreme consequences and their full acceptance, i.e., the continued ability to put up with them. Choosing thus what one does not want to choose, consenting to what one does not want, effects an *inversion*, for by choosing death Kolbe really chose freedom. There may be situations where the only free choice is Hobson’s choice, the choice of (or the consent to) the only alternative of death. In such situations, the inability to sacrifice one’s life may make this life

<sup>331</sup>We would probably not impute Fichte, and certainly not Kant, such a concept of freedom. We only identify the presence – and significance – of such an element in their frameworks.

<sup>332</sup>“If you say that all this, too, can be calculated and tabulated – chaos and darkness and curses, so that the mere possibility of calculating it all beforehand would stop it all, and reason would reassert itself, then man would purposely go mad in order to be rid of reason and gain his point!” [F. Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*. I:8]

<sup>333</sup>St. Anselm of Canterbury, *On Free Will*. V. The argument recurs also, e.g., in St. Anselm of Canterbury, *De Concordia*VI. (This observation is expressed in (most) modal logics as non-distributivity of modalities over disjunction.)

<sup>334</sup>Schopenhauer’s definition of a saint as one who does nothing he would like and everything he does not like, is certainly exaggerated, but need not be dismissed completely.

not worth living. In fact, man seems the less willing to sacrifice his life, the less worthiness his life contains.<sup>335</sup>

A less tragic (because leading eventually to the survival) but more dramatic (extending over several years) example of the choice of preparedness to die is illustrated by the following. "We carried soil in wheelbarrows, bringing it from some fifty meters all the time running at the very edge of the stone pit. The wall was some tens of meters high and was here quite perpendicular. Running we carried the soil and kapo was running along with us, beating us with the stick in the shoulders, hands, heads, faces. [...] After some minutes I realised that I won't manage a whole hour. He will kill me – I thought. Good, but you too, bastard, will get killed and I will have greater pleasure going to heaven in such a company. Kapo was short. I decided to catch him when he gets behind me and fall back. If everything goes fine, we both flutter down to the bottom of the pit, and there it stops, the end."<sup>336</sup>

The examples are intentionally so extreme because they clearly illustrate that freedom is not at all a matter of the *external* situation. Although some situations, contexts, political systems will make free *acts* more difficult, and the feeling of freedom almost impossible, it is nevertheless possible even in the most extreme cases which one might want to classify as the worst examples of unfreedom. My freedom is not liberation 'from' the *actual* dependencies but the way of handling such dependencies. Most importantly, *actual* freedom of acts and *actions* is not any intrinsic property of them, but the fact of being *concretely founded* in the freedom of the person. Thus *founded* freedom is indistinguishable from the meaningfulness of its being, which lends its meaning and *motivation* to the *actual* situations and performed acts – every act and, in particular, the free "act of meaning is related to the unconditioned meaning viewed as an abyss of meaning."<sup>337</sup>

\* \* \*

Freedom is not a roving of a vagabond damned on selecting among arbitrary alternatives but, on 150. the contrary, the ability to select – or what amounts to the same, accept – the right alternative. True freedom is only an aspect of the *nexus of Yes*, is being where it is best to be. For "one who is as he ought to be, and as it is expedient for him to be, such that he is unable to lose this state, is freer than one who is such that he can lose it and be led into what is indecent and inexpedient for him."<sup>338</sup>

The question is not if one, by a universal decree of human nature, by a solid and undeniable, natural or unnatural law, is free or not, if one's will chooses the ice-cream because of one's upbringing, social dependencies and digestive problems or else just because it chooses so, in a complete indeterminacy of emptiness. The question is if one, by the power of one's spirit, is able to live the apparent paradox of submission to the contentless *command*, and thus become worthy of receiving freedom from above. Freedom is but a side-effect, an aspect of *love*, of submission to the *command* and the resulting *non-attachment*. If this sounds like a contradiction then we are pleased – as far as freedom is concerned, this will suffice.

<sup>335</sup>An example of an attitude opposite to the one just mentioned is well documented by Tadeusz Borowski in the stories and novels from his time as a kapo in concentration camp. Few years after the war, he committed suicide. The concentration camp syndrome (corresponding to PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, in more recent psychiatric classifications) originates with the exposure to exceptional cruelty and is not related to victim's premorbid personality (e.g., L. Eitinger, *Concentration Camp Survivors in Norway and Israel*). The very high prevalence of PTSD in the concentration camp survivors, about 85%, still leaves 15% which were not so severely affected. Perhaps, the difference could be referred to the difference between giving up any resistance or else attempting survival for *any* price, on the one hand (yes! both these are on the same side), versus being prepared to die, as many did, preserving some dignity. "Survival in the camps [...] depended foremost on luck: to be able to survive, one had to escape being killed by SS. [...] If he was not murdered, how well a person was able to survive depended on how well he managed to maintain if not some of his autonomy, at least some of his self-respect and meaning his relations to others had for him." [B. Bettelheim, *Owners of Their Faces*. p.108] Grzesiuk, who survived 5 years in various extermination camps, notes that he "who wanted to survive must not have been afraid of death, for everyone who wanted to live and was afraid of death – was afraid of being exposed to beating and executed dutifully all the commandments, awaiting a miracle and the end of war or that they will release him and that he will get through. When he realised that he was getting close to the end, it was too late and for such a one there remained only crematorium." [S. Grzesiuk, *Five years of KZ*. Preface] From the egotic perspective of a free choice, the ones like Borowski chose as freely (or unfreely) as those like Kolbe or Grzesiuk. But we would insist that while the latter remained free, the former did not, and the distinction has nothing to do with the way they made the choice but only with *what* they chose.

<sup>336</sup>S. Grzesiuk, *Five years of KZ*. III. Mauthausen;p.95-96

<sup>337</sup>P. Tillich, *What is religion?*. I:1.1.e

<sup>338</sup>St. Anselm of Canterbury, *On Free Will*. I

## Responsibility

Let us close this list of examples with a seemingly lesser and more modest issue: responsibility. We touched upon this in connection with the original sin in 2.1.§28, footnote 69. Genuine responsibility is the *actual* attitude of response to the higher voice. When this trace is followed all the way to the *absolute origin*, responsibility coincides with what the theological tradition called “obedience to God’s will” and what we have recognised as an aspect of *humility*.

151. 4. We have said, §28 and §§39.ff, that the original sin is neither willed nor deliberately committed and thus, technically, it is not a personal sin. Yet, as we share in the penalty for the original sin without personally sharing in the sin itself, many maintained that one may have to endure punishments which one has not merited. We might exaggeratedly say that one is responsible even for sinking into the mud of despair – not because one can do something specific and avoid this sinking once it started, but because one is still responsible for taking up the challenge of not accepting the *visible* impossibility of relief, that is, of accepting its *invisible* possibility.

We can exaggerate even more than that. As a form of sickness of existence which loses its *concrete foundation* in the *absolute*, the original sin (in our sense) is evil and for it, like for any other evil, we are responsible. Responsibility, as a response to the *absolute*, is simple non-acceptance of any evil, of *alienation*. In this sense, everyone is genuinely responsible for *all evil and all sins* which are committed, not only for those which one has committed oneself. “Every man who sins, sins against all people and every man is to some degree guilty of another’s sin.”<sup>339</sup> It is unacceptable to all manner of thinking involved into any form of subjectivistic reduction – of sin and guilt to feeling of sin and guilt, of freedom to unconstrained voluntary choice, and eventually also of responsibility to such a choice. But we are responsible not only for what we choose but also for what we are; not only for the *subjective acts* of choice, but also for choices which we live, even though they were made before and *above* us; not only for what we could somewhat, voluntarily and actively repair but also, even primarily, for all that we can not. One resists such a responsibility, firstly, because it seems to restrain one’s sense of freedom and, secondly, because it cannot possibly be put into any specific action. With regard to freedom we have just seen that it amounts to *openness* to the *communion* and not to fortifying oneself behind the walls of private choices. And this apparently ‘empty’ and ‘unproductive’ sense of responsibility ‘for everything’ (which is just another side of the deeper sense of guilt, not intended nor actively caused and yet committed), could be equally well characterised as sympathy and fellow feeling for everything, as a mere compassion with all the victims, a mere recognition of the evil which met them, and as repentance for evil as such – as *love of universal communion*. Regarding ‘unproductivity’, let us quote Scheler’s response to the same accusation against repentance: “The jovial gentlemen say: Do not repent, but design good projects and do better in the future! But the jovial gentlemen do not say whence the strength for designing good projects and even more for their execution should be fetched, if no prior liberation and self-empowerment of the person, through repentance, against the determining power of the past takes place.”<sup>340</sup> Strangely enough, strength to carry out *actual* tasks is an *inversion* of *humility*, and increases proportionally to the latter, §111.

The universal scope of this responsibility, surpassing any particular *actuality*, is a *sign* of continuity between the *actuality* and its *invisible origin*. This form of responsibility may be different from what is commonly, let alone legally, understood under this name, but responsibility it is nevertheless (if not in other way, then simply by *founding* any active, *visible manifestations* of responsibility.) Refusing it, one breaks the continuity of Being, reduces *onself* to mere *subjectivity* and the *communion* to mere association. And every *spiritual* reduction is a form of *alienation*.

152. 3. In a more specific sense, *I* am responsible for *my* whole life and, as strangely as above, also for all the evil which affected me. For even if it is not accepted voluntarily, it affects me only if I consent to it – consent, perhaps, by not seeing anything, perhaps, by seeing in it no evil, perhaps by giving up the resistance to it – in either case, even if not accepting voluntarily so still accepting. More precisely, I am responsible not for the evil which affects me as such, but for the fact that *it*

<sup>339</sup>F. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*. At Tichon’s II

<sup>340</sup>M. Scheler, *Repentance and Rebirth*. p.36. «Die jovialen Herren gar sagen: Nicht bereuen, sondern gute Vorsätze fassen und Zukünftiges besser machen! Aber dies sagen die jovialen Herren nicht, woher die Krafte zum Setzen der guten Vorsätze und noch mehr die Kraft zu ihrer Ausführung kommen soll, wenn nicht die Befreiung und die neue Sichselbstbemächtigung der Person durch die Reue gengenüber der Determinationskraft ihrer Vergangenheit vorher erfolgt ist.»

*affects me*, that it affects me *as evil*.

Herein lies an important difference between various people not only reacting differently but also developing differently under apparently quite the same circumstances. Eventually, *I* – and only *I* – am fully responsible for what *I* have become – blaming the society, school situation, family conflicts, and what not, may have some merit *only in so far* as the objective improvements of the respective social contexts are concerned. Being exposed to evil influences is not a sin but one sins very easily by an irresponsible response to such an exposure, a response by which one damages oneself or, what amounts to the same, finds inexcusable evil in the world which one makes responsible for the evil which infects one's soul. Irresponsibility, whether inability to recognise one's responsibility or escape from it, is thus not only escape from suffering but even from things which are seen as its source. It is a *sign of broken communion*, an aspect of enslavement by evil – eventually, the *posited* evil – of the world. In the ultimate form of such an *ingratitude* men accuse God for having created or allowed all these evils and “lay blame upon [...] gods for what is after all nothing but their own folly.”<sup>341</sup> Yet, through such a distancing oneself from the evil and responsibility for it, one only deepens *alienation* from oneself. For one thus forgets that God acts *only* through one's soul, that “[a]ll works are performed by warmth, [and] if the fiery love of God grows cold in the soul, the soul will die.”<sup>342</sup>

**2.-1.** Responsibility from §151 can be likened to an impulse to help and repair all the suffering which, although impossible to follow for trivially practical reasons, *founds* all particular acts of genuine help. It is responsibility of a response to the call of conscience, a response to the *command* reminding one about the suffering – one's own or others' – hearing which and remaining indifferent would amount to a consent. Of course, we do not suggest that the *communion* expressed in the sense of responsible compassion with all suffering should be brought to the level of *actuality* in the same universal form.<sup>343</sup> In every *actual* situation challenging one's compassion, and hence also responsibility, one has to weight the possibilities of *actually* following the call against multitude of other factors. Even if all such factors prevent one from *actually* doing anything specific, the mere compassion with the needy ones is also an expression of responsibility. (Solon asked “what should be done to make people commit as few crimes as possible, answered that also those who did not suffer from the crime, should be as much moved by it as those who were its victims.”<sup>344</sup>)

Irrespectively of situation and other factors, one carries full *actual* responsibility for *everything* one does and everything one leaves undone. The question may only concern the degree of this responsibility and its consequences. This *actual* responsibility for one's acts and deeds is not something *I* may assume or not assume, but something that follows from their very *foundation* in my being and its *communion*. Ultimately, responsibility is simply the fact of, on the one hand, ontological *foundation* and, on the other hand, of the influence of the lower levels on the higher ones. The first aspect concerns the *actual* responsibility for everything *I* have done and am doing, also for avoiding or removing the consequences of the evil which affected me. If *I* am doing something blameworthy in this very moment, one may point to me being temporarily unconscious, affected by drugs or childhood trauma, but no such excuses provide a complete justification. Eventually, *I* am responsible for what *I* am, and *everything* *I* am doing is a reflection of that. In the most trivial situations, saying “I am sorry”, one is not sorry for one's bad will and intended acts but exactly for something one has done *without* intending it, for something which merely happened *through* one. “I am sorry” not for intending to collide with another person but for the very fact that I did not notice him *and* run into him. This is the *actual* responsibility for my past.<sup>345</sup> The

<sup>341</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*. I:32

<sup>342</sup> Eckhart German Sermons, Lk.VIII:54. [O. Davis, ed., *Selected Writings* 26, J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., *Meister Eckhart*... 85]

<sup>343</sup> Such constancy of the sense of guilt and repentance without any accompanying shrinkage of personality or decrease of energy is probably as seldom as holiness. “[It belongs] to the increase of humbleness and holiness in man that – as life testifies to the most holy – the sense of guilt gets functionally *refined* accordingly to its [guilt's] objective decrease and that thence even lesser misconduct is heavily experienced.” [M. Scheler, *Repentance and Rebirth*. p.48] «[Es gehört] zum Wachstum der Demut und Heiligkeit in Menschen, daß – wie das Leben aller Heiligen bezeugt – das Fühlen der Schuld gerade mit ihrer objektiven Abnahme sich funktionell *verfeinert* und daß daher immer geringere Verfehlungen schon schwer empfunden werden.»

<sup>344</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives, Teachings....* I:2

<sup>345</sup> Agamemnon admits: “it was not I that did it: Jove, and Fate, and Erinys that walks in darkness struck me mad when we were assembled on the day that I took from Achilles the meed that had been awarded to him. What could I do? All things are in the hand of heaven, and Folly, eldest of Jove's daughters, shuts men's eyes to their destruction.” [Homer, *The Iliad*. XIX:86ff] But this workings of Folly (or as others translate it, infatuation,

other aspect is directed towards the future, is responsibility for what *I* become. It amounts to the fact that everything *I* do, every actual project and act may with time seem to disappear from the *actual* memories, but it nevertheless contributes to the *virtual* seeds of *my soul*. Although the exact measure of this contribution and its eventual consequences are only seldom possible to discern, its very fact is hardly disputable, II:2.3. In this sense, every evil done, increasing the alienation of the soul, breeds its own punishment. The call to taking up responsibility for this evil amounts to the call of conscience and following it, to repentance and voluntary atonement.

154. Actual responsibility not founded concretely in the higher *community*, gets involved into interminable search for the criteria separating things for which one should be (held) responsible from those for which one should not. Such criteria are certainly of forensic importance but do not concern us here. Lack of *foundation* demands often explicit assumption of responsibility. It is like marking a new area as being *mine*, belonging to *me*, falling under *my* responsibility. Such acts are often required in various contexts of cooperation and subordination. But if this is their only foundation, it witnesses to an ego which is sufficiently alienated to believe that there are things – sufficiently remote, sufficiently *not-mine* – for which one might not be responsible. Reducing responsibility to such very specific contexts and situations goes hand in hand with other forms of reduction. For responsibility is interwoven into a whole *nexus* of ontic presuppositions which have to be reduced when one attempts to reduce its scope.<sup>346</sup> For instance, a temporal loss of consciousness can be used to exempt one from responsibility for the act performed in such a state. This, of course, presupposes a specific reduction of person according to which, for instance, sleeping man is not a person. Well... No! Of course, he is but... Well. Likewise, one will often use past history of a person to excuse his acts implying, as it were, that they are merely consequences of bad influences of the environment. It is then really hard to get out of the impasse because now, so it seems, responsible person is only somebody not exposed to any negative influences, as if a crucial aspect of moral responsibility did not concern exactly the ways in which one is affected by and reacts to such influences. Reduction of responsibility to only conscious and voluntarily intended acts is just another form of reducing person to a *subject*.

Let us only remark one final detail. Everything we have said about responsibility concerns only *my* responsibility, only what *I* am responsible for. No consequences follow for imputing responsibility to others. The problem with such attribution, like with any demands of moral behaviour, is that nobody can be forced to recognise its validity. You can not make somebody responsible for something – you can only force him to take responsibility. This is an issue for law enforcement units and not for us. In contacts with people one will, of course, assess the level to which they feel responsible for various things and act accordingly, perhaps, by suggesting more responsibility than they are prepared to admit. Rising children one will teach them taking responsibility – directly, by requiring them to actually take responsibility for various things, and indirectly, just by being responsible the way one is. Our ‘universal responsibility’, like everything else, is only for personal use. It is the way of avoiding alienation, of avoiding *positing objective* evil by imputing responsibility for encountered suffering. *Objectivisation* of evil and resulting tense responsibility is the domain of a rigid moralist who is ready to censure every single act, of others’ or oneself, for its moral shortcomings. Strict and solemn seriousness of such an attitude finds the more offenders and becomes the more self-justifying and irritably sensitive, the more doubts about its ultimate justification germinate at its bottom, that is, the less *concretely founded* is its perspective on human existence which terminates at its moral dimension, if not at the level of single acts.

\* \* \*

155. The above examples might suggest an ideal which seems as fantastic as unrealistic. But ideals which do not and can not live are posited phantoms, regulative ideas or ideological goals, egotic projections, in short, *idols*. Well, for the first, “[a]ll things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.”<sup>347</sup> More significantly, all *invisible aspects of concrete foundation* appear as ridiculous when

---

momentaneous loss of control) is not cited by Agamemnon as any excuse; higher forces have been at work, but they worked through him: “I was blind, and Jove robbed me of my reason; I will now make atonement, and will add much treasure by way of amends.” [Ibid. XIX:137]

<sup>346</sup>R. Ingarden, *About Responsibility...* conducts a systematic analysis.

<sup>347</sup>B. Spinoza, *Ethics*. [the last sentence]

reduced to the *actual* categories; the appearance which is only strengthened by possible *inversions*. All embracing, *spiritual* responsibility, when attempted at the level of *actual* feelings and expressions, will result not in any factual responsibility and acts but rather in the hysterical lamentations of elderly (and good) women over the evils and cruelty of the world. *Actual* responsibility for everything, *actual* freedom of every single choice and action, *actual* communion with every man one meets, *actual* love towards every person, animal and thing – all such reductions reflect only the reduction of *self* to *ego* (II:1.4.4.vii.§135), the fundamental misunderstanding which attempts to interpret the *spiritual* in *visible* terms, to turn the quality and *rest* of *acts* into facts, the wind into stones. But “[t]he wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth.”<sup>139</sup> *Forgetfulness* of the spiritual, involved in *concrete foundation*, dispenses with any such reductions which is just another side of dispensing with any attempts to re-produce *invisible* as some *visible* image, to reach the infinite making only finitely many finite steps. But leaving any ‘whats’ aside, it keeps the *clear* sight of the fact that its *actuality* is indeed *founded* in the higher sphere, and that it carries responsibility for the *concreteness* of this *foundation*, even if it is not entirely its work.

Unlike unreachable ideals which can only be approximated, we are dealing here with the most *concrete presence* which is fully possible – it need not be approximated because it can not be made *actual* and palpable. Indeed, one can not defend it, nor fight for it, nor try to reach it – one can at most live it. Some impossibilities are difficult only because they are too simple. But, as Confucius says, life is simple and only man insists on making it complicated. Any experience of love which is not fully *incarnated love* is distorted and is aware of its imperfection. Most experiences are of this kind but *love* is not, for this reason, an unattainable ideal, a regulative idea, an inaccessible goal. If only one person in the whole human history reached its *experience*, this would be enough to maintain its universal possibility. There are all reasons to suspect that there were more than only one and, in case of doubt, one should look carefully around oneself, expecting the unexpected. The imagined absence is often only the inability to recognise the *presence*. *Concrete love* is not a mere state of mind, a mere feeling, an image, vague and *unclear*, of something ideal and in its mere desirability completely ‘unreal’ because not *actual*. It is a thoroughly *concrete manifestation* flowing from the center of personal being and embracing the whole life, from above all general thoughts and *qualities*, through all *actions* and goals, to the most *immediate acts*.

But one might still ask: where is the necessity? Where is the necessity of *concrete foundation* of all these lower elements in the higher ones and, eventually, in the *spiritual love*? We can easily imagine a man who is strong but not patient, who is strong and patient but not humble, who finds great sense in life without having confronted *nothingness*, who is alert and vigilant but not *open*, who acts morally and responsibly not only without any higher *command* but exactly because he does not recognise any higher authority, etc., etc., etc. Indeed, we can as easily imagine such a man as we can imagine Pegasus. For imagination enables us exactly to put together, almost arbitrarily, various features earlier *dissociated* from each other. The games which *reflection* can play with its *dissociated signs* are almost unlimited. And they affect the world, just like other *distinctions* do. The question is, however, whether such abstractly drawn *distinctions* and arranged *complexes* correspond to others, whether they can be woven into the *unity of existence* and its *experience* of the world – and that *concretely*, not as mere imaginations.

Necessity of *concrete foundation* does not concern any specific aspect; as we have emphasized, each aspect can indeed be found at a lower level without *concrete foundation* in the higher ones. The old question, whether virtues can be possessed separately or only all together, posits wrong alternative – in practice, in nature, both cases occur, albeit the former much more frequently than the latter. Focusing on one such feature, the difference between the two cases might, for an ‘outside’ observer, seem slight to the degree of insignificance. But the lack of *actually observable* differences and behaviours does not, by itself, witness to anything of significance. In fact, the difference is infinite and, like every infinity, *actually unobservable*. So, after all, the alternative is real but it concerns something much deeper than the mere occurrence of this or that virtue. It concerns the whole person.

The *unfounded* virtues can be *dissociated* and appear in very different constellations. One will then often strive for strengthening some of the virtues one does not possess and such exercises can easily take big part of life. Such virtues can be, piecewise, acquired. The process may turn out very valuable and lead to a deeper development. However, there is also always the chance

that aiming particularly at, say, perseverance, one will keep biting one's teeth and grow only more stubborn, or else more bitter as the posited perseverance keeps sneaking out of one's *actual* look never matching the intended image. Developing (right) habits is a lengthy and complicated process which even in the case of children escapes clear-cut rules and all too precise guidelines. It is particularly difficult, if not outright impossible, when one aims at only one specific aspect. The *unity* of a person has also this trivial consequence that, for instance, quitting smoking may result in increased consumption of candies, while developing perseverance may result in a loss of, say, the sense of spontaneity. Every change of no matter how small aspect affects the whole person or, as one also puts it, must be integrated into this whole. Such psycho-egotistic manipulations have always side-effects which are as understandable, having once emerged, as they were unpredictable in advance.

According to St. Thomas, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are infused directly by God, and only by Him. But also moral and intellectual virtues which, under natural circumstances, can be acquired separately by human efforts, can be infused by God, so that they are "caused in us by God without any action on our part, but not without our consent."<sup>348</sup> The acquired virtues of this kind function, so to speak, each for itself and without reaching the personal center. Their infused versions, on the other hand, are *concretely founded* in the *unity*: first, the lower *unity* of the *invisible* sphere where, as we saw in II:1.4.2.ii, various aspects cannot be meaningfully *dissociated* from each other, and eventually, in the *unity* of the *existential* center, where grace becomes "charity, which through an image in the mind exhibits what is absent as present to ourselves, through love unites what is divided, settles what is confused, associates things that are unequal, completes things that are imperfect! Rightly does the excellent preacher call it the bond of perfectness; since, though the other virtues indeed produce perfectness, yet still charity binds them together so that they can no longer be loosened from the heart of one who loves."<sup>349</sup> Thus, even if for an 'outside' observer, two kinds of virtues can seem indistinguishable (since patience *is* patience, temperance *is* temperance), the ones are as if added to the person while the others flow from the person. The *concretely founded* ones are only suggestions of the *unity* of the person, the *visible signs* of Yes which do not veil nor confuse this *unity* but *manifest* it. Only this *transcendent foundation* gives them all their force and adds the *invisible rest* – continuity and *unity* – making all the difference.

## 4 The analogues of God

*"Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."*

Matt. V:37

157. Book I, in particular, I:6.2, p. 71.ff, described the bareness of the notion of the one as the ontological origin. *Concreteness of spirituality* is still *founded* in this bare *nothingness*. But while in Book I we were concerned with the merely ontological meaning of the one, now we want to emphasize that also with respect to the *spiritual presence* and *concrete foundation*, equipping Godhead with all kinds of attributes, whether in essence, in fact or only in name is inappropriate whenever it may obscure the fact of his complete *invisibility*.

One has often emphasized the 'human need to speak about God'. There may be such a need, and it may be very human, but this is exactly the question and not the answer. The need reflects the fundamental meaning of the divine in our life, the meaning which awaits if not an explanation nor even an account, so at least an expression. But "[b]e not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."<sup>350</sup> Speaking about God may be harmful when it *posits* too many attributes and dwells on His inaccessible 'essence'. "We cannot approve of what those foolish persons do who are extravagant in praise, fluent and prolix in the prayers they compose, and in the hymns they make in the desire to approach the Creator."<sup>351</sup> For where is the border between praise and appraisal, and then between praise and self-complacency over praising the right God in the right way? There may be a border and it may be marked by the extravagant exaggeration. Yet from the start, speaking about *nothing* we use distinctions and distinct words which, in the

<sup>348</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. II:I.q55.a4.r6

<sup>349</sup>St. Gregory the Great, *Epistles*. Book V:LIII. To Virgilius, Bishop.

<sup>350</sup>Eccl. V:2

<sup>351</sup>M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*. I:59

last resort, means that we can only speak about ourselves, about our *confrontation*. “Everything which falls under a name is originated, whether [we] will or not.”<sup>352</sup> And so, only “silence is praise to Thee.”<sup>353</sup>

## 4.1 Proper names

No name is adequate for God, just like no name is adequate for a person.<sup>354</sup> This is why language 158. has proper names, for proper name is the only adequate name for a person; no other name, not to mention any predicate or more or less definite description, will even approach this adequacy. So is it with God – “God” is His only adequate name. Perhaps, it should be JHVH, for “God” may be used about lesser gods and idols, too. The fact that saying “God”, one can mean various things does not make the name – when applied properly – less adequate, just like knowing two persons with the same name “Thomas” does not make any of its applications wrong or inadequate. They are both persons and each has a *unique* name (instead of two persons with the same *name* “Thomas”, one could rather speak of persons with the same *names* “Thomas”). It is only a trivial accident of secondary importance that their unique names have the same linguistic appearance. (The use of patronymics, of family names, middle names, etc. can be seen as an attempt to keep the linguistic appearances in accordance with the uniqueness of the named persons.)

The uniqueness of a proper name follows from the fact that the word used as a name is inseparable from the *acts* of naming. There is hardly any syntactically identifiable class of words which are ‘names’. Sure, “Thomas” and “Berit” and hundreds of other words are standard names. But they do so exclusively for the reason of being so used, that is, of being used for *naming*. Name is inseparable from the fact and *act* of naming, it is the sedimented epitome of the latter, while naming itself is a trans-linguistic, in fact, trans-phenomenal event of recognising uniqueness of this *concrete existence*. Unrepeatability, ultimately the uniqueness of *existence*, is the *conceptual* content of every proper name. The actual name, as well as the *act* of naming, is only an expression of the deep event of naming in which one recognises the unrepeatable character of a being, usually, of some *existence*. Getting a child, the parents have already named it, already long in advance, even if they still do not know what actual name it will get. The linguistic expression of this event, the *actual* naming, endows it with the immediately recognisable aspect of *non-actuality*, solidifies it into a lasting, usually even social, fact. One could say, proper name *reflects* the eternity of the named *existence* in the perpetual consistency of all different acts of naming.

Corresponding to the absolute uniqueness, a name does not capture any essence, it is, as often 159. observed, conceptually empty. This conceptual emptiness makes proper names the most *concrete* among the linguistic signs – they are understood *uniquely*, or not at all. And this unique understanding involves only *that*, identification of the person named, identification which happens within the *horizon of actuality*, but which only reflects the *unity* beyond any concepts. This trans-conceptuality of names expresses the highest respect and recognition of the named – in general, we name humans. In a similar way, we express some amount of recognition and respect naming other living beings, pets, etc.. But if one started naming one’s pencils or pieces of furniture, we would react to the misunderstood endowment of such disposable things with the metaphysical quality of trans-conceptual being. (But as usual – where is the border...?) Names like “Sitting Bull” or “Crazy Horse”, or usual nicknames, do intend to express some essential aspects, one might perhaps say, some *concept*. But they are proper names only in virtue of the *uniqueness* of their reference. Proper name does not capture any essence but only indicates the site of its possibility, the unique individuality. It indicates the ultimate limit of *distinctions*, beyond which not only no more *distinctions* are made but were no *distinctions* could possibly be made.

## 4.2 Names

The decisive issue is, just as with “Sitting Bull” and the like, *what* one intends when using a name. One can endow “Sitting Bull” with derogatory content by simply reducing it to the mere

<sup>352</sup>St. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*. V:13

<sup>353</sup>Ps. LXV:2. Maimonides’ interpretation is the same as St. Jerome’s, cf. II:footnote 315. In kJV, however, the whole verse reads: “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come”.

<sup>354</sup>Cf. footnote 315 concerning the homonymy of “name” standing for both nouns and adjectives.

description, that is, ignoring the fact that it is a proper name. Likewise, forgetting that “God” is a proper name, one tends to reduce its meaning. The traditional discussion is concerned with the admissible, if any, ways of such a reduction; not with the proper names but with the names understood as possible predicates about God.

160. “All creatures have existed eternally in the divine essence, as in their exemplar. So far as they conform to the divine idea, all beings were, before their creation, one thing with the essence of God.”<sup>355</sup> “That which is perfect’ is a Being, who hath comprehended and included all things in Himself and His own Substance, and without whom, and beside whom, there is no true Substance, and in whom all things have their Substance. For He is the Substance of all things, and is in Himself unchangeable and immovable, and changeth and moveth all things else.”<sup>356</sup> Much interpretation (and even misinterpretation) would be needed to make such fragments acceptable.<sup>357</sup> The language of Platonic exemplars, combined with the need to emphasise God’s goodness and other positive qualities, have made it almost impossible to think of Godhead otherwise than as a collection of some definite, yet always mysterious, attributes or essences which in an equally mysterious way are meshed into one. On the other hand, it was precisely the image of the higher, eventually the highest, somewhat ‘containing’ everything lower, as a box contains sand or as genus contains species, that forced one to double things with exemplary ideas and, eventually, to make Godhead responsible for all the details of the *visible world*. But *virtuality* does not ‘contain’ all the *distinctions* which flow from it, except as their *indistinct origin*. Substantiality of self-identical, independent entities has been discussed earlier in, hopefully, sufficient detail. Application of this category to the *invisibles* leads unavoidably to antinomies. But such an application is by no means necessary, even though similar examples of modeling *invisibility* of the *origin* on the Platonic ideas superimposed on the Christian intuitions, could be multiplied *ad nauseam*.

#### 4.2.1. Godhead vs. God

The *indistinct* is ultimately *invisible* and *nothing* can be said about it. “Thou art a God that hidest thyself.”<sup>358</sup> What then is it one is actually speaking about, and what is it one is actually saying? “Why dost thou prate of God? Whatever thou sayest of Him is untrue.” For “the Godhead is nameless, and all naming is alien to Him.”<sup>359</sup>

161. Any doctrine starting with *deus absconditus* who, somehow, influences or at least remains *present* in the world, needs the distinction which eventually amounts to setting the hidden and inaccessible on one side and its action and manifest influence on the other.

“The Godhead gave all things up to God. The Godhead is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not. It is God who has the treasure and the bride in him, the Godhead is as void as though it were not.”<sup>360</sup> The first division of nature, according to Eriugena, is the uncreated which creates, the God in his primordial and incomprehensible reality; the second division is the created which creates, God considered as the primordial and ideal cause(s) of all things. (Spinoza’s *natura naturans* versus *natura naturata* is only an ultimately pantheistic expression of the same distinction.) Pseudo-Dionysius distinguishes the Undifferenced Godhead and its Differentiated nature,<sup>361</sup> which for him, as the obedient and dedicated Christian writing after not only the First Council of Nicaea but also of Chalcedon, could only mean co-substantiality of Father and Son, and in fact, the Trinity of persons. Proclus says: “It is thanks to beings with which they are conjoined that all gods receive names, and hence thanks to these beings knowledge of various subsistences of these gods is possible, though in themselves they are unknowable.”<sup>362</sup> Gods themselves should be, probably, thought as occupying even more specific, lower spheres than the One itself, and the ultimate ‘One-beyond-the-One’

<sup>355</sup> Henry of Suso

<sup>356</sup> *Theologia Germanica*. I

<sup>357</sup> E.g., to “comprehend and include all things in Himself” must not be taken in the Platonic sense of the pre-existing, ready-made archetypes; one should carefully distinguish “His own Substance” from all the other “Substances” (“Substance” is actually understood by the author “not as a work fulfilled, but as well-spring” [*Theologia Germanica*. XXXII] which we could interpret in terms of *virtuality*) etc., etc..

<sup>358</sup> Is. XLIV:15

<sup>359</sup> Eckhart [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*.VII]

<sup>360</sup> Eckhart

<sup>361</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, II:3ff

<sup>362</sup> Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. §162

which Iamblichus posited above the Plotinian One. The distinction can be found in Philo from Alexandria<sup>363</sup> and then appears clearly in Clement, according to whom *via abstractionis* leads from the experience towards a spiritual unity above time, space and apprehension, but which is still not the ultimate God, for “God is one, and beyond the one and above the Monad itself.”<sup>364</sup> Anticipating the later neo-Platonic hierarchy of emanations, Numenius of Apamea had to associate with the changeless and all-transcending God a Demiurge of dual nature who, relating also to matter, could accomplish the creation of the world. Plato refused to discuss certain things, yet the Demiurge from *Timaeus* seems to be an active symbol of the One, “the father and maker of all this universe [who] is past finding out” and who “committed to the younger gods the fashioning of [...] mortal bodies”. In the sixth letter Plato asks a friend to swear “in the name of the God who is captain of all things present and to come, and of the Father of that captain and cause.”<sup>365</sup> The distinction is present in Indian thought from the Vedic beginnings (*Prajapati*, Lord of Creatures vs. *Purusa*, Soul of the Universe), through the more personal relation of late Upanishads,<sup>366</sup> with perhaps the sharpest expression in the relation between the unmanifest, absolute Brahman sustaining the universe and the manifest Brahman bearing qualities and containing the universe. In some less orthodox disguises, the distinction may be discerned in Martion’s Creator versus Saviour, the God of the Jewish bible versus the Christ of the apostolic gospel – the roots of all later gnosis with its opposition of the evil Demiurg and the good God.<sup>367</sup> Traditional Cabala distinguishes between the hidden vortex of Godhead, *En-Soph*, and its manifestations in the world through the intermediary emanations, *Sephiroth*. According to Zohar, even the Tetragrammaton JHVH does not denote the hidden vortex but only the first and highest among the *Sephiroths*.<sup>368</sup>

As usual, we prefer to overlook differences, sometimes even vast ones, in the conceptual framing and significance of the distinction and, instead, focus on the fact of its recurrence. According to Maimonides, we can assign attributes to God’s action, but not to His essence. “Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity [...] is an attribute of His action and not an attribute of His essence”<sup>369</sup> and “these attributes too are not to be considered in reference to His essence, but in reference to the things that are created.”<sup>370</sup>

162.

Indeed, as all the ‘essence’ beyond the possible *distinctions* is *indistinct*, the only name is *indistinct* (*nothing*, one). “Unknowable” is already analogical suggesting, on the one hand, that there might be something to be *actually* known and, on the other hand, rising partiality (incompleteness and imperfection) of our *reflection* to the level of ontological impossibility of contact. All other names (or else, all names suggesting more than *nothing*) can refer only to the character of the *existential confrontation*: the names apply to God’s actions only. In so far as God is *actually* known to us, that is, *recognisable* in *actual experiences*, He “is not known to us in His nature, but is made known to us from His operations or effects, [and] we name Him from these [...] But taken from this operation, this name “God” is imposed to signify the divine nature.”<sup>371</sup> This divine nature operates, as we said in 3.2.§71, only through human soul, first, in the process of *ontological founding* and, eventually, through the *existential confrontation* which says Yes. We would thus

---

<sup>363</sup> Already God’s reason, the intellectual realm, is beyond language: “that world which consists of ideas, it were impious in any degree to attempt to describe or even to imagine: but how it was created, we shall know if we take for our guide a certain image of the things which exist among us.” [Philo of Alexandria, *On the Creation* IV] Philo’s opposition: the possibility of knowing *that* God is vs. the impossibility of knowing ‘what’ He is, is discussed e.g. in H. Wolfson, *Philo*.

<sup>364</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*. I:8. *Miscellanies* V:11 addresses specifically abstraction from creature leading to God who remains above every image.

<sup>365</sup> Plato, *Letters*. VI:323.D

<sup>366</sup> E.g., Krishna says to Arjuna: “I am the Father of this universe, and even the source of the Father” [*The Bhagavad-Gita*. IX:17]

<sup>367</sup> M. Brumlik, *Der Gnostiker: der Traum von der Selbserlösung des Menschen*, II:4

<sup>368</sup> F. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [The Cabalistic hierarchies of divine names and emanations meet and merge with the Christian counterparts in the Renaissance. Pico was familiar with the system of *Sephiroths* of Cabala when repeating the angelic hierarchies of Pseudo-Dionysius, and both traditions merge in Francesco Giorgi’s *De Harmonia Mundi*.]

<sup>369</sup> M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*. I:53

<sup>370</sup> Ibid. Among the early Christians, the idea appears in St. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* II:6: “But these words, Father, and God, and Creator, and Lord, and Master, are not names, but appellations derived from His good deeds and functions.” A real distinction between the unknowable essence of God and His actions, or ‘energies’, making possible a real communion, belongs to the orthodoxy of the Eastern Church since the councils in Constantinople in 1341 and 1351.

<sup>371</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q13.a8.ans.

tend to identify the actions of God with ...the deepest aspects of experience.<sup>372</sup> Considered *in abstracto*, these aspects amount to the deepest layers of *ontological* and *epistemic foundation* as it was considered in Book I (and also Book II, in particular, 1.4.2.i). But *concretely*, it is the sphere of the constant tension between Yes and No, of the constant *foundation of actuality* on the one side of this *invisible distinction*...

#### 4.3 Two faces of the one

“*God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this;*”  
Ps. LXII:11

163. God, the *incarnated Godhead*, is only where a human being is. The site of its dwelling is the *existential confrontation* where *nothingness* begins to differentiate, where, as Eckhart says, “Godhead [gives] all things up to God.” God, the *concrete presence* of Godhead, is determined by the *spiritual dimension* of man’s being, by the Yes or No of the *spiritual choice*. The one as the *ontological origin* is but the *indistinct nothingness*, remote, ineffable and indifferent. The *spiritual choice* affects this *nothingness* in the most fundamental way – *love* experiences it as the *origin* and generous fullness, while *self-centredness* as a mere void, at best, as an indifferent principle of ultimate transcendence. These are in fact experienced aspects of life, world, various situations but aspects which cannot be ascribed to any particulars. In so far as they are *founded* in the *spiritual choice* itself, they emerge as aspects of ... *nothingness*. But *nothingness* has no aspects! Here – between the *nothingness* of the *origin* and the *nothingness* of *self*, between the naked *self* of Godhead and its image, the naked *self* of an *existence*, in the tension of the *spiritual choice* which is not *my choice* but which gives the flavor to *my whole existence* – here the Godhead gives all things up to God.
164. In I:5.2.3.i-5.2.3.ii, we have discussed the traditional doubling of the *indistinct* as, on the one hand, the formless matter under all beings and, on the other hand, the ineffable divinity above all beings. *Ontological foundation* of both is *one* and the same, the *indistinct nothingness*, which concerned us in Book I. But *ontological foundation* lacks concreteness which is our current subject. The *indistinct nothingness* can be stated, to some extent described and ... left for itself. But leaving it for itself is only an illusion because its presence is perpetually reflected, if in nothing else than in the *thirst*, perhaps even in the search for a *foundation*, that is, for the *origin*. The *foundation* is concretely present in life, but this presence may assume one of the opposite forms, depending on the *spiritual choice*: “if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.”<sup>188</sup> “God responds differently to different human attitudes.”<sup>373</sup> One might be tempted to understand here by the “attitudes” any *actual behaviors* and acts. Although this is, to some extent, possible, it is primarily the *spiritual attitude* which makes God show different face. *One* and the same never appears, it is never *object* of *any experience*, yet it is *experienced*. It is *experienced* in the rest of all the acts we perform and all the *actual situations* we encounter. The *spiritual choice* gives this *ontological omnipresence* a concrete form of the analogues which, when brought down to the level of *actuality*, may become *objects* of *actual experiences* appearing as direct signs of God.

No encounters emptiness – apparently indifferent but eventually terrifying – not as a demonic fear, perhaps as Kierkegaardian *Angest*, but then also, as underneath the emptiness one starts to suspect one’s illusion, as the specifically *numinotic*, awe- and often terror-inspiring *tremendum sacrum, ira deorum*. It is *tremendum* so often aroused by the God of the Old Testament. *Tremendum* arises from *nothingness*, but by its very appearance and strength it announces the ultimate power, *majestas* hidden beneath it.<sup>374</sup> “As roaring torrents of waters rush forward into the ocean, so do these heroes of our mortal world rush into thy flaming mouths. And so as moths swiftly rushing enter a burning flame and die, so all these men rush to thy fire, rush fast to their own

<sup>372</sup>This may not conform fully to the orthodoxy which, for instance as Maimonides, sees in God’s attributes the guidelines: “for the chief aim of man should be to make himself, as far as possible, similar to God”, and enumeration of God’s attributes “is the lesson that we should acquire similar attributes and act accordingly.” [M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*. I:54/III:53] As is often the case, so also here, regulative ideas may be all that is left from a concretely founding nexus when it gets translated into the language of reflective decisions, will and *actual actions*. Here, the results of such a translation are only *analogical reflections* of various aspects of Yes, to which we will return in a moment.

<sup>373</sup>P. Tillich, *The Question about the Unconditional*. I:4.Biblical religion and quest of being.4.1

<sup>374</sup>One distinguishes, of course, clearly this *tremendum* with awe and trembling which it arises from any fear of things, people, demons or the world itself. Cf. R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, IV.a.

destruction.”<sup>375</sup>

There is, of course, a more subtle sense of the dread of God which does not arise from the *actual* fear of damnation but from its mere possibility, woven into the understanding that *I am not the master* and into the awe of God’s *invisible* power. “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. [...] the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;”<sup>376</sup> Such a fear is but an aspect of another form of *confrontation*, for which God’s face emerges “as a sacred fire that gives light and life to the whole universe in the splendour of a vast offering.”<sup>377</sup> For Yes, *nothingness* emerges with the ultimate goodness, majestic and sacred *augustum*. The attracting force of the *sacrum*, called by Otto “*fascinans*”, may found more *actual* experiences of exaltation or mystical joy (rather than of fulfillment and completeness). But it is primarily the *non-actual* force of constant *inspiration* which has delivered one from the threatening emptiness and *alienation*.

So God may be revengeful and merciless or else merciful and generous. “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.”<sup>378</sup> But He remains the same God for that – the two are only faces of the *one*. Thus, in spite of all our debts to neo-Platonism, there is yet another crucial difference (not addressed earlier in I:§176–§177). The two – let us say, ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’ – do not represent opposite ontological poles; ontologically, they are the same *nothingness*. ‘Evil’ is not just the last, lowest level of emanations from the ‘Good’, or perhaps even only a lack of some aspect of a full emanation. In a much more Christian way, ‘Evil’ has its site at the very beginning, it emerges from paradise with the first human: it is very close to Godhead.<sup>379</sup> But this closeness to the *origin* does not mean that ‘Evil’ follows from it. It only means that human *existence* reaches all the way to the border of *nothingness* – only therefore ‘Evil’ can corrupt it so deeply, even if never completely. The two represent only the characteristics of the *meeting* with God, the extreme and opposite possibilities of the existential *confrontation*: the No which sees only emptiness and void, and the Yes which, too, sees *nothing*, but *nothing* which is the *invisible origin*.<sup>380</sup> The negative emptiness, in particular, is not an ontological opposite of the *one*, but only an epistemic mistake in one’s experience. It is despair – and, most generally, evil – which *alienating existence* from its *origin*, makes the latter appear as empty nothingness, total lack. This total lack, this ultimate void of emptiness is substantialisation of *thirst*, effected by the No.

The need to speak about God may arise from the *reflective attitude* which, inscribed within the *horizon of actuality*, cannot escape the spell of *objective* way of speaking which, inscribed within the circle of its actions and voluntary choices, cannot escape from deciding for or against. Indeed, speaking about God may be helpful as an admonition that *visibility of this world* does not exhaust the field of existence; as a suggestion of the quality of the *confrontation*; as a reminder that what seems impossible may nevertheless happen, that the reality of *thirst* overcomes the *actuality* of all facts. God has “set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”<sup>381</sup> Speaking about God may help in such a choice for, as Bacchylides quoted by Clement says, “one becomes wise from another, both in past times and at present, for it is not very easy to find the portals of unutterable words. [...] We speak not as supplying His name; but [...] we use good names, in order that the mind may have these as points of support, so as not to err in other respects.”<sup>382</sup>

The simplistic contradiction – “God is” vs. “There is no God” – is possible only after one has reduced the supposed ‘being of God’ to the level of *actual experience*, to the level of ‘being a

<sup>375</sup> *The Bhagavad-Gita*. XI:28-29

<sup>376</sup> Ps. II:11/XXXIII:18

<sup>377</sup> *The Bhagavad-Gita*. XI:19. Krishna answers the reverent invocations of Arjuna: “Thou hast seen the tremendous form of my greatness, but fear not, and be not bewildered. Free from fear and with a glad heart see my friendly form again.” [Ibid. XI:49]

<sup>378</sup> Is. XLV:7

<sup>379</sup> Of course, one can find neo-Platonic fragments pointing in this direction, like for instance: “The evil that has overtaken them [the souls] has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process, and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self ownership.” [Plotinus, *Enneads*. V:1.1]

<sup>380</sup> Considering the biblical personalism, Paul Tillich remarks “There is no sense to ask if the holiness itself is personal or if its carriers are persons. [...] The question is: What do they become as the elements of a religious meeting?” [P. Tillich, *The Question about the Unconditional*. I:4.Biblical religion and quest of being.3.1] We extend this claim to all assumed ‘attributes of God’.

<sup>381</sup> Deut. XXX:19

<sup>382</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*. V:11/12.

thing'. It helps little to claim that this is not the intention, for this is, in fact, the result; and when the results are clear, the intentions matter very little. Assuming that such an alternative is at all possible, one has already falsified the meaning of the possible positive answer. A better question would be "What does "God" mean?", or even "What does God mean?", though this, obviously, involves one in the matters on which even the most prominent theologians (or, perhaps, especially they) can not agree. Any precise answer can be accused of arbitrariness (but this should not worry us for we view any specifics of this matter at most as *analogues*). The advantage of this form of the question is that the previous alternative ("He is not" vs. "He is") becomes now "He means nothing" vs. "He means something". The former will quickly declare Him to be non-existent but it will also tend to involve some uneasy awareness of rejecting more than one intended. No matter the declared choice, one feels that the question has now much more direct relevance, that it addresses not only the universal order of the *objective* world but also one's existence. And it does it because it also makes more clear the underlying element of choice which is not dictated merely by *objective* 'being' or 'non-being' of something, but by the way one meets whatever one meets.

At the very beginning, I:§3, we likened existence to an *imago* of *nothingness*, not in the sense of a similitude but of a reflection, like one player reflects moves of another. The asymmetry of *confrontation* can be likened to the fact that one player has a winning strategy, in fact, is bound to win. But as the game admits the win-win situations, the other player can win, too. Yes amounts to finding the winning strategy and becoming not only an *imago* but also *similitudo Dei*. The 'names' of God are attempts to indicate the winning strategy. Men call God "good" and not "evil", "omnipotent" and not "impotent", and "in saying that God lives, they assuredly mean more than to say the He is the cause of our life, or that He differs from inanimate bodies."<sup>383</sup> The 'names' attributed to God are expressions of Yes, and as such are not arbitrary predicates ascribed to *nothingness* which cannot be ascribed any. They tell one how one could and should *experience* – not God but – the *confrontation* with the divine. For "the form of God is itself the joy with which it is recognised."<sup>384</sup>

166. Just like *commands* leave us free to accept or ignore them, so God's face reflects only the *spiritual choice* made in the soul's depth. As we saw, *spiritual choice* founds concretely the *quality* of the world and its *experience* which become permeated by the aspects reflecting the underlying Yes or No. Yes establishes a relation between the contents of all the levels, *founding* thus also concrete ways of encounter and experience. The traces – down to the level of the most *actual reflections* – of the *spiritual choice*, the *signs* of the *absolute*, are what we call the "analogues".

The term "analogies" is used in the way St. Thomas would only partly accept. Love, humility, etc. are not only genuine aspects of spirit – they are also adequately, absolutely and non-analogically predicated about it. This is possible because *spiritual* relation to *nothingness* is not something absolutely foreign to human experience but, on the contrary, the most intimately present, whether concretely or not, aspect of this experience. The impossibility to specify precisely their meaning does not, in any way, diminish concreteness of this meaning. On the other hand, they not only belong merely analogically to the aspects of *visible* experience, but are also predicated analogically about it. For this experience, even if prior with respect to the reflective knowledge, is actually founded in the *invisibles*. It is from there that words like "love", "humility", "presence", etc. obtain their genuine meaning, which is only analogically applied to the *visible analogues* of the *spiritual love*. The fact that we cannot define precisely what they mean, does not mean that we do not know that. Even if *spiritual love* has not been our share, so *thirst* is an ever present reminder of what it could mean. Aquinas would say: "as regards what these names signify, they are applied primarily to God but as regards the imposition of the names, they are primarily applied to creatures which we know first – hence they have a mode of signification which belongs to creatures."<sup>385</sup> This looks almost the same, but in our case not even the mode of signification belongs to creatures – with respect to particulars we never know exactly what "love" or "humility" mean, we are seldom entirely certain if the use of such names is perfectly adequate, if the *actual sign*, the *act*, is true with respect to the *invisible truth* which it should respect. This uncertainty, however, does not prove that we do not know what they mean, but at most that we do not know

---

<sup>383</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q13.a2

<sup>384</sup> Visvanatha [after A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*. VII]

<sup>385</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. [after I:q13.a6.ans.]

it precisely. We are uneasy with applying them to all too particular situations because, as a matter of fact, they do not quite apply there. To some extent – but only to *some* extent – we can recognise particular acts of love or humility, but they emerge as such only because we recognise their *foundation in love or humility*: there is no ‘act of love’ without love, and we do not learn what “love” means by collecting examples of any particular (kinds of) acts, by taking a course.

Most probably, we learn it *before* we learn anything else. In any case, it is not so that we know “creatures first”, unless we let “knowledge” mean nothing more than the reflective *episteme*, §56. The analogues, these traces of the deepest and most concrete aspects of experience, are not any actual signs, are not any misnomers misunderstood as properties of some actual objects. (Although, of course, there is also such possibility.) They reside primarily in the rest of any actuality and are also known – consciously and reflectively – to reside there. Reflection may, and in fact it does, take recourse to the ‘analogical way of speaking’, in which the aspects of the spiritual dimension of Being find reflections as sedimented and dissociated properties, as the analogues predicated about some being, about something. What this something is remains forever hidden in the *nothingness* of its conception, and the best name man has got is “God”. But in fact these properties and predicates are but expressions of the experience starting in the spiritual center of Being, of the aspects which defy any objectification and remain forever in the background, in the rest. From this *invisible* depth they affect all the actual experiences in a most significant way. If God is good, omnipotent, forgiving, loving, etc., one may imagine that all the problems are solved or, as the case may be, posed. But such analogues neither create nor answer any problems. They only express some aspects of the spiritual dimension of existence which, living Yes, confronts all the same problems and particulars as any other existence – what is different is only the form, the quality of this confrontation.

#### 4.3.1. Yes

The analogues of each choice are only expressions of various aspects of the respective nexus. We therefore list only a few standard examples.

##### *Omnipotence*

167.

The *humility of love* means recognition that *I am not the master*, recognition of the origin as the ultimate power which is the power of the source. Even if nothing actually is the way it was at the beginning, when it emerged *in illo tempore* from the virtuality of the origin, so without this source, nothing would be there. This simple indispensability – not the ability to determine every minute detail of *this world* – is the *omnipotence* of God. Without Him there would be nothing, which is very different from saying that everything is the way He has made it. “Without Me, ye can do nothing.”<sup>386</sup> – is very different from “You do everything the way I want”.

The indispensability of having Him as the first condition accounts also for the misused label of “necessary being”. Once we have reduced necessity to logical necessity, even to an appropriately interpreted unary sentential operator  $\Box$ , there isn’t much left... But we have objected to the linguistic reductions. God is certainly not necessary in the sense of being a particular agent whose absence would entail a logical self-contradiction.<sup>387</sup> He is necessary in the above sense of being omnipotent, in the sense that without Him, there would be (not only *nothing* but) absolutely nothing, total emptiness. “If one is not, then nothing is.”<sup>388</sup> He is the necessary condition, not the necessary cause, of everything that is. The cosmological argument claims well-foundedness of the order of causality, but we would recast it in terms of the order of *founding*. It can be then viewed as an expression of the intuition that this ordering is well-founded and has the *origin*, the indispensable condition of all the rest.<sup>389</sup> The *indistinct nothingness* is, indeed, the first cause, but

<sup>386</sup>Jh. XV:5

<sup>387</sup>One could, however, attempt the proof of the form: if there were nothing to *distinguish* (nothing *indistinct*), there could be nothing *distinguished*.

<sup>388</sup>Plato, *Parmenides*.

<sup>389</sup>This was expressed, for instance, as the distinction between ‘productive’ and ‘conserving’ causes (Cf. I:6.4.§163.) Ockham pointed out that the order of ‘productive’ causes with Duns Scotus could actually be continued *ad infinitum* (in time), and to avoid this possibility he ‘modified’ the argument (for God’s existence) by introducing ‘conserving causes’. The modification can be disputed for Scotus, too, observed in his proof simultaneity of the ‘essential causes’. Such a cause need not ‘produce’ a thing but it maintains it in its being, and as such is co-present with the thing itself. (*Actual* infinity of causes seemed absurd to all, and so the conclusion about the first cause followed.) This form of causation, then, seems to correspond to our *founding co-presence* of all levels of hypostases,

not in any sense of *actual* causality – it is the first cause being the first and necessary condition of everything. The necessity of the *one* is here, almost analytically, the same as the indispensability of the *foundation* in its *original indistinctness*. If we take the label “cause” in this deeper sense of *foundation* then *one*, remaining *indistinct* above and *before* all *distinctions*, is not only the cause of everything but is also ‘self-caused’: *indistinct* needs no *distinctions*, I:154, §154. That God is the only uncaused, that is, self-caused being, used to be but another way of formulating His necessity, though here we are approaching all too much the level of *concepts* and *visible* determinations. Eventually, His necessity is the same as His omnipotence – not the ability to do everything but to *create*, to bring something out of *nothing*, without which event nothing else would be possible.

168. In a much less genuine sense (meaning, leading to, or even perhaps displaying, a misunderstood objectification), one speaks *analogically* about ‘His will’. But the “Godhead is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not”. Only existence can will. ‘God’s will’ is but an expression conveying what *I* should will – *nothing* or, to give it more positive appearance, to say Yes. There is no more content in ‘God’s will’ than the salvation through love. “Sin is nothing else than that the creature willetteth otherwise than God willetteth, and contrary to Him.”<sup>390</sup> Indeed, but this ‘will of God’ which, in a deep confusion one can attempt to look for in *visible signs*, is nothing else than that *I* do not sin, that *I* do not make *idols of this world* but, instead, find the *absolute love*. For “as long as a man is seeking his own good, he does not seek what is best for him, and will never find it.”<sup>391</sup> My obedience – if one insists, obedience to God’s will – is thus nothing more (nor less) than directedness towards Yes. “We strive always for the forbidden, and we desire things denied.”<sup>392</sup> Such an obedience is *humility* which does not try to reach for the *invisible* – forbidden – fruits. It may be rightly called the “fear of God” and, although there need not be any *actual* fear in such an attitude, it is again an expression of God’s omnipotence.

169. **Omnipresence**

The description of *omnipotence* might have left some taste of deism in which Godhead, giving only the initial impulse to the creative differentiation, withdraws from the world leaving it to the secondary causes, that is, to itself. In a sense, this is what we are saying, for God is never any *actual* efficient cause of anything, He never interferes directly into the course of *actual* events: He remains *transcendent*, stays *above* all *visible* and *invisible* things. But at the same time, He is always *present*, as the deepest aspect of every situation, as the eventual limit where *actuality* dissolves in the *invisible* horizon of its *foundation*. And as this horizon surrounds every situation, it not only provides all its *actual* and *visible* elements but can also bring the completely new and unexpected ones. For the most, it is like the presence of a quiet person who apparently does not contribute to the situation, does not influence the events but, by the very presence, makes the situation into something completely different than what it would be without this person. And as it later turns out, this was the person who invited all the others, created and maintained the situation. We have just recalled the distinction between the creative, efficient causes and the conserving ones that do not produce but sustain and perpetuate the effects. Again, replacing the former with the latter, “cause” with *foundation*, we recognise such a constant sustaining presence of the *origin* as the *invisible horizon of actuality* and, eventually, of all *visibility* and differentiation.

170. Openness is openness of the heart for all gifts of the *origin*. In more *actual* terms, it can denote preparedness to meet with the open heart everything and everybody but, for the moment, we are relating it only to the understanding of the (role of the) *one*. Openness means that we recognise it as *omnipresent*, that everything is encountered with the fundamental, only implicit rather than explicit understanding of its being a *gift* of the *origin*, of its being a *hierophany* and, hence, of the *origin* being *present* behind it.

In the most *actualised* form, *openness*, this recognition of *omnipresence*, can find expression as the constant wonder and joy, as a calm intoxication with the world which at every moment unveils new and fresh events which, by their very freshness and newness, acquire an aspect of miracles. It is not the intensity of such a joy which makes it the *analogue*, but its constancy – as

---

which nevertheless coincides with the generative order of ‘productive’ causes. (Ockham’s ‘proof’ can be found in W. Ockham, *Quaestiones in lib. I Physicorum* q.82-86.)

<sup>390</sup> *Theologia Germanica*. XXXVI

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.* XXXIV

<sup>392</sup> Ovid, *Amores*. III:4.17

Eckhart puts it “Who is joyful all the time, he is joyful above the time, liberated from time.”<sup>393</sup> The same analogue may be discerned in the ‘wonder’ owing to which, according to Aristotle, “men both now begin and at first began to philosophize.”<sup>394</sup> Psychological and emotional differences notwithstanding, this famous ‘philosophical wonder’ expresses the same openness to the world which is experienced as a *gift*, if not miraculous, so in any case generous and wonderful, even in its most wicked appearances. Just like man who is *thankfully open* thinks himself undeservedly rewarded, so “a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant”. Being ignorant of everything and wondering at everything, being like a child, is to recognise the generous presence in every *actuality*, to experience *omnipresence*.

*Self-awareness* is an aspect of every *actual* encounter, which makes *me* always, even if only implicitly, aware not only of the thing, the *object*, the situation *I* am confronting, but also of the fact of this confrontation, of its anchoring in the field of *experience* transcending the limits of *actuality*. Although formally we can say that it is *my self-awareness*, yet it does not ‘belong’ to *me*, it is not something *I* determine and control – it accompanies *me* as *my associate*, as a witness, not as *my attribute*; it is an aspect of every *experience*, never its *object*. In *my* focusing on the *actual* contents of *experience*, it witnesses to the presence of something that *transcends* it. Feeble and dependent on *my* recognition, on *my* acceptance of its voice, in the context of *love* it *finds* the *analogue* we might call “God’s *omniscience*”. This is the *omniscience* of which also those not recognising it are warned: “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?”<sup>395</sup> “There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.”<sup>396</sup> It may take the form of a voice of conscience which discloses the *spiritual* context of *my action*, it may be a mere awareness of the presence which *transcends actuality* and also, in the most figurative sense, modified by the reflective attention directed towards it, it may appear as the feeling of ‘somebody looking at me’. The lower such a form, the more common it is. But the presence of its higher forms, and particularly of conscience, is indeed dependent on the *concrete foundation* in Yes. The better a person, the more conscience he has and, in fact, the more guilt he can feel – criminals seldom *feel* unclean conscience. For conscience is yet another aspect of *openness*, which both *opens* us for others and *opens* the *communion* with others to us.

### *Goodness*

172.

*Thankfulness* amounts to recognition of the *origin* as *good* or, what amounts to the same, as the source of *goodness*. *Thankfulness* is but a reflection of the acceptance of the *origin*, of the *recognition* of its *goodness*. This *goodness*, if taken in itself, is empty and impossible to characterise. It does not mean *anything else* except the attitude of *thankfulness* and *acceptance*, nothing except the fact that *I* recognise the value of everything which *I* encounter and am willing to accept it with the underlying *love*. It is not the attitude of Yes which is *good*, it is not some God who is *good*. *Goodness* is the experience of *thankfulness* rendered in terms of *actuality*, is an *analogue* of the latter. Nobody, who does not know this *thankfulness* can ever experience, let alone understand, the *goodness* of God.

Again, in a less genuine sense, one speaks about ‘God’s *love*’, ‘God’s benevolence’, etc. Misleading as such expressions may be, they stand for the purity of *thankfulness* which is its own reward. It “is not chosen in order to serve any end, or to get anything by it, but for the love of its nobleness, and because God loveth and esteemeth it so greatly.”<sup>397</sup> There is no being, no non-being, no *being* – if one insists, no God – sitting there and loving or esteeming anything. This love and esteem are first of all the value and nobleness such a *love* and *thankfulness* have in themselves, opening *me* to the *transcendent gift* which gives the ultimate value to *my life*. Certainly, the ineradicable possibility of the *gift of grace*, the fact that it may be given irrespectively of the earlier circumstances (and sins), irrespectively of how deep one has plunged into the hell and despair, so that even “they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined”<sup>398</sup> – this can be taken as an expression of God’s *love* and *forgiveness* in a quite

<sup>393</sup> Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*. A:V.8.a]

<sup>394</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. II

<sup>395</sup> Jer. XXIII:24

<sup>396</sup> Job XXXIV:22

<sup>397</sup> *Theologia Germanica*. XXXVIII

<sup>398</sup> Isa. IX:2

anthropopathic, almost mundane sense. This should be a legitimate way of speaking – if only one remembers that it is *analogical*.

173. A yet more specific analogue of *thankfulness* is the goodness of the world, with perhaps the most powerful expression in the idea of the best possible world.<sup>399</sup> It is impossible to agree concerning what is the exact acceptable ‘amount of evil in the world’ and whether it is greater or smaller than the total ‘amount of goodness’. Likewise it is impossible to specify exactly the laws which make it impossible to improve this world. But the impossibility lies not in our inability to see or think, but only in the fact that, except for the visible details which do not affect that much, there is nothing to improve for nothing else is under our full control. One may become very indignant at such a dictum, just like one may deny any necessary laws, which cannot be transgressed in constructions of the new brave worlds and then in elimination of some evils. But the more indignant one becomes, the stronger the indication of one’s inability to cope with . . . the world, that is, with oneself. For indignation, and its associate moralism, arise exactly when one is no longer able to see only various, lesser or bigger evils, but begins to recognise The Evil, the unjust, unfair, inequitable world which offends one’s human dignity, in short, when visible evils acquire monstrous dimensions of social or even metaphysical principles.<sup>400</sup> The evils in the world may be innumerable, but the conclusion that the world is evil is a clearest sign of alienation. The idea of the best possible world is the most charming conceptual reflection of the understanding that neither God nor even the world owes us anything – least of all any reasons and explanations.

The world is good in the trivial sense that salvation is always possible. In this respect, the world needs no improvements. All the detailed improvements of the world can be needed for making the society more comfortable or more just, but that has nothing to do with God, for He is getting involved when, and only when, personal salvation is at stake. The performances of televangelists praying for most specific items are certainly close to the peek of vulgarity. But we should observe that a god who figures as a mere postulate of sheer faith that all my good deeds and my good life will be eventually rewarded with equally good items according to a principle of justice, not to say, of just payment – such a god is, too, reduced to an honest clerk matching the list of my deeds against the list of visible wishes and goods. “Happiness is the condition of a rational being in the world with whom everything goes *according to his wish and will*; it rests, therefore, on the harmony of physical nature with his whole end and likewise with the essential determining

<sup>399</sup>Although we would tend to see its existential origin in the mere fact that one encounters suffering, so in the context of theodicy one has to look also for explanation and justification of this fact. E.g., “Now, the order of the universe requires, as was said above (q22.a2.ad2; q48.a2), that there should be some things that can, and do sometimes, fail. And thus God, by causing in things the good of the order of the universe, consequently and as it were by accident, causes the corruptions of things [...]” [St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I:q49.a2] Along slightly different, but still sufficiently similar lines, the world is described by Al-Ghazali as that which is “according to the necessarily right //order, in accord with what must be and as it must //be and in the measure in which it must be; and //there is not possibly anything whatever more //excellent, more perfect, and more complete than it.” [A. H. al Ghazali, *There Is No evil in Allah’s Perfect World*. 41-45 [The following lines contain the standard argument why it must be so – otherwise it would contradict God’s generosity or justice.]] Origen states it, in a way similar to Maximus of Tyre: “Evils, then, if those be meant which are properly so called, were not created by God; but some, although few in comparison with the order of the whole world, have resulted from His principal works, as there follow from the chief works of the carpenter such things as spiral shavings and sawdust, or as architects might appear to be the cause of the rubbish which lies around their buildings in the form of the filth which drops from the stones and the plaster.” [Origen, *Against Celsus*. VI:55] The reservation made by Timaeus in the myth of creation shows the same idea: “God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, *so far as this was attainable*.” [Plato, *Timaeus*. ]

The idea involves two elements: 1. the ‘totality of the world’ – it is *its* goodness and perfection which is maximal, even if it does not appear so to individuals within it (this totality may be, especially in Christian contexts, replaced by the totality of an individual being – the encountered evils serve then the salvation of one’s soul even if one is unable to discern this meaning.); and 2. some inviolable laws which even God must obey – these are responsible for the individual ‘evils’ but they can be only unproductively opposed if they are not resolutely accepted. One might be tempted to discern the idea whenever these two elements are present. Thus one might impute it to Spinoza as much as one observes it in Leibniz. In this form the theme can be found also in the pantheism of Stoics according to which the world must be perfect since it is only the formed and visible aspect of the immanent and active principle, god-*logos-pneuma*, which is perfect by definition. Neither of these points appeals to our anthropology but we can recognise its underlying value, the motivating force of acceptance. It is, however, a bit like saying, in a resigned and moralising tone, “Do not argue, things won’t get better any way”. It hardly comes close to genuine openness which recognises, equally in the moments of happiness and of suffering, not only something one has to put up with but *goodness* deserving *thankfulness*.

<sup>400</sup>One might be tempted to include here most kinds of revolutionaries, many (often well meaning) social and other reformers, as well as petty personalities like Gavril Princip, who cannot or do not want to distinguish the personal problems and diseases from the socio-political ones.

principle of his will.”<sup>401</sup> The opposition of duty and nature, with the associated opposition of morality and happiness (which is merely “rational being’s consciousness of the pleasantness of life uninterrupted accompanying his whole existence”<sup>402</sup>) calls indeed for somebody who might guarantee at least some, and at best ultimate harmony, who might dose “happiness proportioned to [] morality”.<sup>403</sup> Unfortunately, such a guarantor of justice is not much better than one who can offer only an irrational hope of a new car or plastic surgery. Goodness of God is offered as a promise of salvation, as the possibility of saying Yes – to God, and hence also to life in whatever form it meets one. It has nothing to do with *any* rewards, not to mention granting one a happy life “according to his wish and will”. God owes us nothing – not only no candies or feelings of pleasantness, but not even any just rewards.

### **Person**

174.

Like characterisation of any other *nexus*, this one could continue indefinitely. Let us only mention one more aspect which is constitutive for the experience of God as *transcending* all the more particular experiences of *analogical* kind. The *analogues* like the ones we have described so far can enter *any* experience and, in fact, find the most *actual* expression (as the actually *felt* wonder, thankfulness, presence, look from above). In no such *actual experiences*, however, one meets a person.

What makes one a person is the capacity to enter personal relations (as *nexus* precedes its *dissociated aspects*, so here the adjective precedes the substantive, cf. quotation 299.) Personal relation is one which concerns the very center of Being, which is a true *communion*, *sharing* of the *origin*. This *communion*, this most personal relation is possible in its deepest form only between persons. Only one person can reach the personal-center of another, only one being *open* to the *origin* can meet another being in the same *openness*; only one person can tell the name of another, for telling the name is exactly the sign of recognising the unique value of the person, which is but another side of recognising the *shared origin*. A personal meeting is a meeting in the face of the *origin*, is a meeting where nothing is left outside, that is *closed*, for what is being *shared* is the *absolute beginning*, *nothing*, that is, everything.

There is a habit (going back to Locke and Hobbes, if not all the way to Aristotle) of insisting on more definite aspects which would constitute a person – like responsibility, self-consciousness, rationality, freedom. But the only reason for it seems to be the forensic need for a more definite concept, allowing us to distinguish persons from non-persons (sic!). Saying “He is not a (mature) person for he lacks the basic sense of responsibility” or “He is not a (legally responsible) subject for he lacks elementary rationality” may sound quite reasonable, unlike, for instance, “He is not a person for he is not rational”. The parenthetical adjectives press themselves into the formulations, for being a person comes before and stays *above* being anything else, no attribute nor its lack can ever account for a human not being a person. We have described in Section 3.3 the meaning of ‘becoming what one is’, of becoming through the *concrete foundation*, so to speak, a full person, but this is a story about the *kind of person* one might become and not of being or not being a person.

Ontological *foundation* of human existence is equiprimordial with its personal character. This *foundation* accounts also for the uniqueness of every existence, but with respect to the aspect of personality, decisive is the fact of *participation* in the *origin* which *shares* itself. *Confrontation* is the primordial event of such a *sharing* in which the *origin shares* itself with the existence, §122, p. 312. It is thus God who “makes of us a complete person and, consequently, in a meeting with us is fully personal.”<sup>404</sup> This making a ‘complete person’ amounts to augmenting the merely ontological *participation* with the dialogue of *concrete foundation*. But primarily God makes us also a person, because *existence* is constituted by *participation* in the *origin*, emerges only in

<sup>401</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*. II:2.2.v [K224]

<sup>402</sup>Ibid. I:1.1.§3

<sup>403</sup>Such a being “must contain the principle of the harmony of nature, not merely with a law of the will of rational beings, but with the conception of this law, in so far as they make it the supreme determining principle of the will, and consequently not merely with the form of morals, but with their morality as their motive, that is, with their moral character.” [Ibid. [K225]] One might probably look here for an attempt to go beyond pure ethical formalism, although the attempt is left to God. The hypothesis of God is needed, as usual, to make the *dissociated* parts fit again; here, to make us believe that moral life can possibly pay off, not only in principle, and not only where it is its own and highest reward – in the *spiritual*, that is, *absolute dimension* of life which affects its whole – but also in all *actual* wishes and projects.

<sup>404</sup>P. Tillich, *The Question about the Unconditional*. I:4.Biblical religion and quest of being.3.2

the face of Him, in a *confrontation* with Him.<sup>405</sup> Strictly speaking, *nothingness* of Godhead has the non-personal, or trans-personal character of *self*. But this trans-personal character is at the bottom of the very being a person. It is itself non-personal, void of any ‘essence’, the mere purity of the *distinction of birth*, and yet it is the personal center, it *founds* the fact of being a person, the *unity* of existence stretching all the way to the most *actual reflections*. The center of personal being is not itself personal, and it is only by *confronting* something *transcending* one’s personality, something trans-personal, that one is a person.

This *confrontation* is the context but also the eventual content of personal relation. In it God Himself emerges as a person; firstly, by the very definition, by being involved into the personal relation, by being the *absolute* pole of the *spiritual* tension. *Spirit* is a fully *concrete* person or it is not at all. More *concretely*, God is a person because He says your name, because “your names are written in heaven.”<sup>406</sup> God uses quite some part of the book of Genesis for telling people what their names shall be: no more Abram, but Abraham, no longer Sarai but Sarah, and Isaac, and no longer Jacob but Israel, etc. All these names, given by God, represent the personal character of the relation: in the act of naming, God establishes the person as a person. From the very beginning, He is not a mere technician constructing only the mechanism of the world – He addresses a person, long before any consciousness can *actually* grasp the fact. “I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.”<sup>407</sup> And He keeps addressing persons responding to the personal calls and prayers or, as we might also say, to the deepest need of a person: the need of reality, the need of help, the need of grace. He is a person because our only relation to Him can be personal, consummated in the depth where the center of our being meets the center of Being. Personality of God is the ultimate expression of His highest relevance for life, is the *analogue* of His presence in the ultimate *communion*, *sharing* everything with everyone.

#### 4.3.2. No

It is the *spiritual* Yes which calls forth, from the abyss of Godhead, the generous and benevolent person of God. “How beautiful must this appear to him who understands it; how absurd to the ignorant!”<sup>408</sup> The *No*, on the other hand, encounters only its own negativity which, for the most, means encountering emptiness. *Self-centeredness*, refusing to accept that *I am not the master*, does not lend its characteristics to possible descriptions of God. The primary *analogue* of this attitude amounts to the simple conflation of *nothingness* and void – beyond the *visible world*, there is emptiness. Yet, the objectified characteristics of the respective aspects – of *pride*, *ingratitude* and *closedness* – carry a lot of strength, even if one is unable to say to what they possibly could be ascribed – to the world? to the life? to my life? to the proclaimed void surrounding all that? A bit to this and a bit to that, eventually, to everything for *No*, even when it remains most consistent, agreeable and conform, lacks the *unity* and finds its reflections in all scattered bits and pieces – “smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”<sup>409</sup>

175. *Pride* is not necessarily a personal pride, an individual attitude of superiority over others. *Pride* is merely an attitude which does not recognise any higher power, any *origin* beyond *visibility*. The *analogues*, the objectified expressions of that embrace so many *idols* that one can hardly attempt to enumerate them all. The *objectivistic illusion* from I:5.2.2, the assumption or conviction that everything consists of things, eventually, of *objects*, is an important example. It underlies all kinds of intellectual arrogance, naive or sophisticated scientism, exclusive worship of causality and ‘hard facts’. As has been frequently observed, humanism is another field providing a host of examples. “But how can anyone judge or love what he does not know?”<sup>410</sup> – this is, perhaps, the most concise summary of *The Oration*. The real question, however, is what one understands by “knowing” and what is there worth such “knowing”. In a sense, this text is an attempt to elucidate some fundamental issues of our life – it is humanistic. But the adjective rings wrongly because the human nature is not so plainly and *visibly* human as many ‘humanists’ would often like it to

<sup>405</sup>This seems to be the source of the well known close connections between personalism and some form of (typically Christian or Judaic) theism.

<sup>406</sup>Lk. X:20

<sup>407</sup>Is. XLIV:4

<sup>408</sup>M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*. II:6

<sup>409</sup>Zech. XIII:7 [Mrk. XIV:27]

<sup>410</sup>G. P. della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

be.

The objectified analogue of *closedness* may be expressed by the simple statement “The world is as it is”. The facts are there, true, ‘objective’, irresistible, and the only thing we can do is to conform to them, possibly, to manipulate them so as to achieve our goals. The apparent activity of such an attitude of smartness towards the givens is underlined by the fundamental, *spiritual* passivity, the all pervading resigned acceptance of givens as givens – the world, after all, is as it is. It becomes stiff and rigid, not necessarily because it is how science is forced to see it, but because it has been raised to the status of the highest and only reality governed, as Stoics would have it, by the irresistible laws of necessity. Impossible as such laws may be to specify precisely, they are haunted behind all our failures and defeats which, obviously, must have some ‘objective’ reasons.

The objectified analogue of *ingratitudo* is the image of life and world as, if not basically and essentially so to a large extent, bad, mischievous, perhaps, even evil. In the world we meet many things and situations and most of them require an attitude of suspicion and scrutiny. Such a project can hardly fail; the field for Voltairean grimaces at Candide’s disasters and the naïveté of Panglos’ optimism is inexhaustible – the grimaces are so obviously convincing, that they will always appeal to the adolescent ‘rationality’ of the Enlightened flavor. One will always find many serious examples which can be used as strong reasons justifying ungrateful attitude, indeed, ridiculing any idea of *gratefulness*. And, in fact, in many situations one better stay alert. But there is a great difference between seeing a danger in the particulars of a situation, and seeing danger everywhere, between being wary of a person who creates an impression of dishonesty and being wary of all people, perhaps, even of all people in general. The suspicious alertness is the fundamental modus of ungratefulness, reflecting and originating in the general idea of the world rendered in terms of harm and reward; the world which, moreover, unless one prevents it, will do one some harm. “Most are at odds with that with which they most constantly associate – the account which governs the universe – and . . . what they meet with every day seems foreign to them.”<sup>411</sup>

\* \* \*

All the aspects of the *self-centeredness* of No express the opposition to the idea that it results from any choice, whether *spiritual* or not. There is nothing there, and so there has never been anything inviting to, not to say, forcing any fundamental choice. Lacking the concrete *foundation*, No is occupied with a constant search for *visible* reasons serving as its explanations – in the world, in life, in one’s life... The lack of *justification* only increases *thirst* for it. But as no *visible* and objective foundation can be obtained, the issue of *spiritual choice* appears as pure subjectivism, a mere projection. For indeed, to great “absurdities men were forced by the great license given to the imagination, and by the fact that every existing material thing is necessarily imagined as a certain substance possessing several attributes; for nothing has ever been found that consists of one simple substance without any attribute. Guided by such imaginations, men thought that God was also composed of many different elements, viz., of His essence and of the attributes superadded to His essence. Following up this comparison, some believed that God was corporeal, and that He possessed attributes; others, abandoning this theory, denied the corporeality, but retained the attributes.”<sup>412</sup> All this, according to Maimonides, leads to polytheism for one is eventually forced to deify each separate attribute or element of the divine essence. We would rest satisfied with the statement that this amounts to anthropomorphic image of God which becomes, indeed, a projection of our forms of understanding. This, “[t]he divine essence is nothing else but the essence of man; or, better, it is the essence of man when freed from the limitations of the individual, that is to say, actual corporeal man, objectified and venerated as an independent Being distinct from man himself.”<sup>413</sup>

It is easy to agree with the element of criticism against the naive, childish image of God – and here one agrees with Maimonides as much as with Feuerbach.<sup>414</sup> But the two part ways very quickly. For while Maimonides, Xenophanes and most others criticise a *misperception* of God,

<sup>411</sup> Heraclitus DK 22B72

<sup>412</sup> M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*. I:51

<sup>413</sup> Feuerbach [after F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*. vol.VII:II.15]

<sup>414</sup> Or, for that matter, with many others, one of the first being Xenophanes accusing poets of ascribing to gods all too human features: “They have narrated every possible wicked story of the gods: theft, adultery, and mutual deception.” [DK 21B12/11] The observation that “Aethiopians have gods with snub noses and black hair, Thracians have gods with grey eyes and red hair” [DK 21B16] summarises Feuerbach’s reductions of theology to anthropology.

Feuerbach identifies naiveté of such a misconception with the essence of religion.<sup>415</sup> Answering the accusation of a subjective projection one could mention several things. Firstly, even with respect to the brief quote from Feuerbach above, the ontological argument remains: whence do we get the idea of our essence (or anything) ‘freed from the limitations’?... Ideal limits are usual accomplices of unsuccessful reductions, failed attempts to grasp something higher. More importantly, there is the category mistake, characteristic for the *objectivistic illusion*: *subject-object* distinction loses gradually its validity and does not apply at all at the level of *invisibles*. Nobody is able to voluntarily create the object of one’s faith. *I* certainly does not do it. So God, to the extent it arises from ‘man’, arises from *his self*. But then there is no need to project it as “an independent Being” because *my self* is not *myself*, nor *self* is *my self*. Man is more than *himself*, “man infinitely transcends himself.” One cannot ascribe the *analogues* (taken as expressions of a genuine *spiritual choice*) any *subjectivity* because they reside not only far *above* the *actuality* of the *subjective acts* but also *above me and my whole life*. A favourite triviality one might bring against the reality of such a *choice* would be the claim that everybody can decide it for *himself*, and this is what one means by “*subjective*”. But, for the first, the fact that *I* can choose whether to kill my boss or not, does not make the alternatives of the choice, nor its consequences, anything subjective: whatever *I* choose, will affect the world in which we live (the *objective world*, if one insists). But one would still object: *I* can chose, it is only *up to me* to decide – there is nothing objective, nothing ‘outside’ which forces me to choose one rather than other. This may be true about usual *acts*, and *acts of choice* in particular, but not about *spiritual choice*. *I* do not decide, *I* can at most choose to consent to or reject its result. Its objectivity resides in its *transcendence* – *I* do not create the alternatives, nor do *I actually* choose between them. *I* can only relate to them, for even if they do not stay *objectively ‘outside’*, they by far *transcend* the sphere of *visibility*. *Spiritual choice* is not something *I* decide and make – *I* only carry it with me. Its reality is not consummated in any *actual act* (in such *acts I* can at most *reflectively* consent to the *choice* or try to direct *myself* towards one of the alternatives) but remains constantly *above my world*. In this sense, as the fundamental *aspect of existence*, as the ever *present possibility*, it is much more objective than any *actual objectivity*.

177. But, truly, it is not so that Yes *sees* something that No could not see; both *see* just *nothing*. The difference lies in the character of the *confrontation*, in that while No finds nothing where there is *nothing* to see, Yes finds the *origin*. This truth concerns ‘the world’ as much as the one who recognises it, and hence it cannot be reduced to a mere act of comprehension, to a mere recognition of a factual, *objective truth*. There is, after all, *nothing* to see. When one finds God it is not because one has traveled far enough and reached the insight, some new hidden truth. It is because one has recognised that the very place from which one has not moved and the very things which have been around all the time witness to the divine presence and disclose it to one who is *open* to their silent voice. “Some people make believe to find God as a light or savour; they may find a light or a savour but that is not to find God. According to one scripture, God shines in the dark where every now and then we may catch a glimpse of him. Where to us God shows least he is often most.”<sup>416</sup> Those similes equating God with sun and our powers with eyes unable to look straight into it because of its overwhelming brightness, lead easily to imagining some ‘*objective*’ brightness to be sought ‘out there’. But this so imagined ‘*objective being there*’ reflects nothing more (nor less) than the constant possibility of Yes; ‘*objectivity*’ is a figure of speech signaling this constant *presence independent* – just as the *objects’ temporal duration* – from our attention and recognition of it. Beyond that the image of ‘*objectivity*’ may be deluding for it is Yes which brings forth the brightness, not (any experience of) brightness which *founds* Yes.

The ultimate sense of absolute objectivity of God emerges from Yes and amounts to its constant possibility. I may know or believe it, or not, I may go around spending my life in complete indifference or despair, I may deny its very possibility. No matter what I do, the possibility always remains, perhaps only infinitesimal and almost disappearing, usually completely *invisible*,

---

<sup>415</sup> It might be very easy to pretend that statements like “God created everything through me, when I was in the ineffable foundation of God [...] If I were not, there would be no God. There is no need to understand it” [Eckhart [after R. Otto, *The Mysticism of East and West*.A:IX]] support such identification (3.2,§§71ff). The difference concerns only the presence of the ultimate *transcendence* behind such statements – Godhead, after all is there, even if He acts only through me. Only this, apparently minimal, invisible difference separates two completely incommensurable worlds.

<sup>416</sup> Eckhart, *Last Word to His Friends*.

but still a possibility. All the things which we can manipulate and arrange according to our wishes, are as pleasing as they are uncertain – if they can be arranged, they can also happen to get dis-arranged. But the indifference to our attention, this non-relativity to being perceived or not, to being arranged or not, even to being intended or not, is actually what one considers the most fundamental characteristic of objectivity. Only that its certainty does not emerge from any analyses but from *trust*. The luminous face of God waits unmoved, unchanged, patient for being discovered, though not for being seen. And when it is discovered, it is discovered as having been there all the time, waiting unmoved, unchanged, the same as it was discovered for millennia ago and as it will be in all the future. The ultimately certain – unchangeable, *shared* and objective – is the ultimately *invisible*: eternity, the presence of the origin.

The truth of a mathematical theorem does not depend on anybody personally understanding it or not – it is usually announced by the more able to the less able ones. When announced, it remains as a possibility for anybody interested to figure out its meaning and proof. The fact that most of us never do, does not take any objectivity away from it. We may need an occasional reminder that the theorem does hold, in spite of our inattention. But you know that, once you sit down and study, it will emerge with the sense and meaning which others have discovered about it before you. Is there any more *absolute* sense of truth? Is there anything more objective, more certain?



# INSTEAD OF POST SCRIPTUM

Not earth and water, nor two came from one  
and many are lands, while depths hide the beginning,  
till the end of time...

The higher you climb, the lower you descend  
The roads of many are wide, but the door only one,  
entering, one returns...

Life is strife, strife is death. No borders.  
Stop seeking, then you will find,  
when two become one.

What is, becomes, and passing - remains.  
The dead live unless the living die. Every thing is yours  
'cos nothing can be owned.



# Bibliography

- ABELARD, PETER, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*, in P. Abelard, *Ethical Writings*.
- , *Ethical Writings*, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995, [translated by Paul Vincent Spade].
- , *Ethics*, in P. Abelard, *Ethical Writings*.
- ALCINOUS, *Didaskalikos [The Handbook of Platonism]*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, [translated by J. Dillon].
- ALLEN, BARRY, *Truth in Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1993.
- ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, *Homo apostolicus*.
- ALTHAUS, PAUL, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1981, [translated by R. C. Schultz].
- ST. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *De Concordia: The compatibility of God's foreknowledge, predestination, and grace with human freedom*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.
- , *Monologion*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.
- , *On Free Will*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.
- , *On the Fall of the Devil*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.
- , *On Truth*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.
- , *Philosophical Fragments*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.
- , *Proslogion*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.
- , *Reply to Gaunilo*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.
- ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *On Being and Essence* [translated by Robert. T. Miller].
- , *Contra Gentiles*, Benziger Brothers, 1924, [translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province].
- , *Summa Theologica*, Benziger Brothers, 1947, [translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province].
- IBN'ARABI, MUHAMMAD, *The Treatise on Love*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1995, [my retranslation from Polish *Traktat o Miłości*].
- ARENKT, DIETER (editor), *Der Nihilismus als Phänomen der Geistesgeschichte*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1974.

- ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* [translated by W. D. Ross].
- , *Physics* [translated by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye].
- , *Posterior Analytics* [translated by G. R. G. Mure].
- , *On the Soul*, The Peripatetic Press, 1981, [translated by H. G. Apostle].
- , *Nicomachean Ethics*, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989, [translated by M. Ostwald].
- ARMSTRONG, D. M., *Universals and Scientific Realism: A Theory of Universals*, Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- ARON, RAYMOND, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, Transaction Publishers, 2003.
- ST. AUGUSTINE, *On Order*.
- , *On True Religion*.
- , *Christian Doctrine*, in P. Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II of series I.
- , *The City of God*, in P. Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II of series I.
- , *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, in P. Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII of series I.
- , *On The Holy Trinity*, in P. Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III of series I.
- , *Confessions*, New American Library, 1963.
- AUSTIN, J. L., “*Truth*”, *Aristotelian Society*, vol. 24, 1950, in S. Blackburn and K. Simmons, eds., *Truth*.
- BAKER, G. P., and HACKER, P. M. S., “*Malcolm on language and rules*”, *Philosophy*, vol. 65, pp. 167-179, 1990.
- ST. BASIL, *Nine Homilies of the Hexaemeron*, in P. Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VIII of series II.
- BATAILLE, GEORGES, *The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade* in G. Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*.
- , *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, Minneapolis, UMP, 1985, [translated by A. Stoekl, C. R. Lovitt and D. M. Leslie, Jr.].
- , *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, City Lights, San Francisco, 1986, [translated by M. Dalwood].
- , *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*, Subterrean Co., 1991.
- BAUDELAIRE, CHARLES, *Paris Spleen*, 1860.
- , *My Heart Laid Bare*, 1897.
- BELLOUR, RAYMOND, “*Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*”, *Les Lettres Françaises*, (1165), 1967.
- BENACERRAF, PAUL, “*What numbers could not be*”, *Philosophical Review*, vol. 74, pp. 47-73, 1965, in P. Benacerraf and H. Putnam, eds., *Philosophy of Mathematics*.
- BENACERRAF, PAUL, and PUTNAM, HILARY (editors), *Philosophy of Mathematics; Selected Readings*, Cambridge University Press, 2 , 1983.
- BERDYAYEV, NICOLAY, *I and the world of objects. An essay in philosophy of loneliness and participation.*, Paris, 1934, [my retranslation from Polish *Rozważania o egzystencji*, Antyk, 2002].
- Bereshet Rabati (midrash to The Book of Genesis)*, Hanoch Albeck, Jerusalem, 1940, [my retranslation after R. Graves, R. Patai, *Hebrew Myths*].

- BERGSON, HENRI, *Time and Free Will, an Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, Kessinger Publishing Company, Montana [translated by F. L. Pogson].
- , *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1986, [translated by R. A. Audra and C. Brereton].
- , *Matter and Memory*, Zone Books, New York, 1991, [translated by N. M. Paul and W.S. Palmer].
- BERKELEY, GEORGE, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*.
- , *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists*, The Harvard Classics, 1909-14.
- ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *On Consideration*.
- , *On Loving God*, Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org>, 2000.
- Bet Ha-midrash*, Adolph Jellinek, Leipzig, 1853-77, 6 vols., reprinted in Jerusalem, 1938.
- BETT, HENRY, *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, Cambridge/Russell&Russell Inc. New York, 1925/1964.
- BETTELHEIM, BRUNO, *Owners of Their Faces*, in *Surviving and Other Essays*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1979 (1952).
- The Bhagavad-Gita*, Penguin, 1962, [translated by J. Mascaró].
- BLACKBURN, SIMON, and SIMMONS, KEITH (editors), *Truth*, Oxford University Press, 1999.
- BLACKWELL, RICHARD J., “*Matter as a subject of predication in Aristotle*”, *The Modern Schoolman*, vol. XXXIII, pp. 19-30, 1955.
- BLAKE, WILLIAM, *There is no natural religion*.
- , *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.
- , *Letter to Rev. Dr. Trusler*, 23.08.1799.
- BOEHNER, PHILOTHETUS (editor), *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1990, [translated by the editor].
- BOETHIUS, *Commentary to Isagoge*.
- , *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu>, 1902, [translated by W. V. Cooper].
- ST. BONAVENTURA, *Commentaries on the Four Books of Sentences of Master Peter Lombard*.
- BORGES, JORGE LUIS, *Funes, his Memory*, in *Collected Fictions*, Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999, [translated by A. Hurley].
- DE BOVELLES, CHARLES, *De nihilo*, Vrin, Paris, 1983, [translated by P. Magnard].
- BRADLEY, F. H., “*On truth and copying*”, *Mind*, vol. 16, 1907, [in S. Blackburn and K. Simmons, eds., *Truth*].
- BREMNER, GAVIN and SLATER, ALAN, and BUTTERWORTH, GEORGE (editors), *Infant Development: Recent Advances*, Psychology Press, An imprint of Erlbaum Taylor & Francis Ltd., UK, 1997.
- BRODY, B., *Identity and Essence*, Princeton University Press, 1980.
- BROOKS, R. A., “*A robust layered control system for a mobile robot*”, *IEEE Journal of Robotics and Automation*, vol. 2, pp. 14-23, 1986.
- , “*Intelligence without representation*”, *Artificial Intelligence*, vol. 47, pp. 139-159, 1987.

BRUMLIK, MICHA, *Der Gnostiker: der Traum von der Selbserlösung des Menschen*, Vito von Eichborn GmbH & Co Verlag KG, Frankfurt am Main, 1992.

BUBER, MARTIN, *Dialog (Zwiesprache)*, in M. Buber, *The Dialogical Principle*, [my translation from German *Das Dialogische Prinzip*].

—, *The Dialogical Principle*, Verlag Lambert Schneider, Gerlingen, 1992, [my translation from German *Das Dialogische Prinzip*].

—, *I and You*, in M. Buber, *The Dialogical Principle*, [my translation from German *Das Dialogische Prinzip*].

—, *The Problem of Man*, Aletheia, Spacja, Warszawa, 1993, [my retranslation from Polish *Problem Człowieka*].

—, *Man's way according to the Chassid teaching*, Cyklady, Warszawa, 1994, [my retranslation from Polish *Droga człowieka według nauczania chasydów*].

BUTLER, JOSEPH, *The Analogy of Religion*, <http://posner.library.emu.edu/Posner>.

CALOGERO, G., *Studi sull'eleatismo*, Rome, 1932, [my retranslation of fragments from H. von Steuben, ed., *Parmenides: Über das Sein*].

CALVIN, JOHN, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [fragments in A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*].

CANTOR, GEORG, *Foundations of a General Theory of Aggregates*, Teubner, Leipzig, 1883, [*Grundlagen einer allgemeinen Mannigfaltigkeitslehre*; in G. Cantor, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*].

—, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen mathematischen und philosophischen Inhalts*, Springer, 1932, edited by E. Zermelo.

—, *Contributions to the Founding of the Theory of Transfinite Numbers*, Dover, 1952, [translation by P. E. B. Jourdain of *Beiträge zur Begründung der transfiniten Mengenlehre*, 1895; in G. Cantor, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*].

CAPELLA, MARTIANUS, *Arithmetica* [fragments in A. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*].

CAPUTO, JOHN, “Without sovereignty, without being: unconditionality, the coming of God and Derrida’s democracy to come”, *Journal of Cultural and Religious Study*, (4.3), 2003.

CARABINE, DEIRDRE, *John Scottus Eriugena*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

CARNAP, RUDOLF, “The logicist foundation of mathematics”, *Erkenntnis*, 1931, in P. Benacerraf and H. Putnam, eds., *Philosophy of Mathematics*.

CASEY, EDWARD. S., *Piaget and Freud on Childhood Memory* in H. J. Silverman, ed., *Piaget, Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.

CELSUS, *On the True Doctrine: a Discourse against the Christians*, Oxford University Press, 1987, [translated by R. J. Hoffmann].

CHAPPELL, VERE, “Matter”, *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 70, 1973.

CHURCHILL, WARD, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in America, 1492 to the Present*, City Light Books, 1997.

CICERO, MARCUS TULLIUS, *On the Nature of the Gods*, London: Methuen, 1896, [translated by F. Brooks].

CLAREMBALD OF ARRAS, *The Gloss on Boethius’ “De Trinitate”* in D. B. George and J. R. Fortin, eds., *The Boethian Commentaries of Clarembald of Arras*.

- CLARK, STEPHEN R. L., "A Plotinian account of intellect", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. LXXI (3), 1997.
- CLEARY, JOHN J. (editor), *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon*, Ashgate, 1999.
- ST. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, [Protreptikos].
- , *The Instructor*, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, [Paidagogos].
- , *Miscellanies*, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, [Stromata].
- COHN, J. F., and TRONICK, E., "Three-month-old infants' reaction to simulated maternal depression", *Child Development*, vol. 54, pp. 185-193, 1983.
- COLLINI, STEFAN (editor), *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- COPLESTON, FREDERICK, *A History of Philosophy*, Image Books, Garden City, New York, 1977.
- COSTA, CRISTINA D'ANCONA, "Separation and the forms: a Plotinian approach", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. LXXI (3), 1997.
- COTKIN, GEORGE, *William James: Public Philosopher*, University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- D'ANCONA, CRISTINA, *Rereading Ennead V 1[10],7*, in J. J. Cleary, ed., *Traditions of Platonism*.
- DAVIDSON, DONALD, "On the very idea of a conceptual scheme", *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, (47), 1974.
- , *A coherence theory of truth and knowledge*, in HENRICH, D. (editor), *Kant oder Hegel?*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1983.
- DAVIES, BRIAN, and EVANS, GILLIAN ROSEMARY (editors), *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*, Oxford University Press, 1998.
- DAVIS, OLIVER (editor), *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings*, Penguin, 1994, [selected and translated by the editor].
- DEE, JOHN, *The Mathematicall Praeface to the Elements of Geometry of Euclid of Megara*, Science History Publications, New York, 1975.
- DELEUZE, GILLES, *Bergsonism*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1966, [my retranslation from Polish *Bergsonizm*, Wydawnictwo KR, 1999].
- , *Difference and Repetition*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1968, [my retranslation from Polish *Różnica i powtórzenie*, Wydawnictwo KR, 1997].
- DENNETT, DANIEL, *Consciousness Explained*, Penguin, 1991.
- , *The self as a center of narrative gravity*, in KESSEL, F. and COLE, P., and JOHNSON, D. (editors), *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992.
- DENNETT, DANIEL, and KINSBURNE, MARCEL, "Time and the observer: the where and when of consciousness in the brain", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 15, pp. 183-247, 1992.
- DERRIDA, JAQUES, *Différance* in J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*.
- , *The supplement of Copula* in J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*.
- , *Margins of Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, 1982, [translated by A. Bass].
- , *Roundtable at the conference Religion and Postmodernism III*, Villanova, 2001.

—, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, 2003, [translated by M. Hobson].

DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives, Teachings and Sayings of Famous Philosophers*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1982, [my retranslation from Polish *Żywoty i poglądy słynnych filozofów*].

DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *The Divine Names*, in Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names and Mystical Theology*.

—, *The Mystical Theology*, in Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names and Mystical Theology*.

—, *On the Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, Kessinger Publishing Company [translated by C. E. Rolt].

—, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, The Shrine of Wisdom, Fintry, Brook, England, 1935.

DODDS, E. R., *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, 1951.

DOSTOEVSKY, FYODOR, *The Brothers Karamazov* vol. VI in F. Dostoevsky, *Selected Works*.

—, *Notes from the Underground*.

—, *The Possessed* vol. IV in F. Dostoevsky, *Selected Works*.

—, *Selected Works*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa, 1955-59, [my retranslation from Polish].

DUMMETT, MICHAEL, *What is a theory of meaning?*, in GUTTENPLAN, SAMUEL (editor), *Mind and Language*, Oxford, 1975, in S. Blackburn and K. Simmons, eds., *Truth*.

DUNS SCOTUS, JOHN, *De Anima*.

—, *Opus Oxoniense* [most quoted fragments in A. Wolter, ed., *Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings*].

—, *Questions on the Metaphysics* [quoted after other authors as specified in the text].

—, *A Treatise on God as First Principle*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988, [my retranslation from Polish *Traktat o Pierwszej Zasadzie*].

DURKHEIM, EMILE, *The Suicide*, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2001, [my retranslation from Norwegian *Selvmordet*].

ECKHART, *The Book of Divine Consolation* in O. Davis, ed., *Selected Writings*.

—, *Commentary on the Book of Wisdom* latin works in J. Quint and J. Koch, eds., *Meister Eckhart... vol. II*.

—, *Last Word to His Friends*.

EDINGER, EDWARD F., *The Creation of Consciousness*, Inner City Books, Toronto, 1984.

EDWARDS, JONATHAN, *Original Sin* [fragments in A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*].

EITINGER, LEO, *Concentration Camp Survivors in Norway and Israel*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1964.

EMILSSON, EYJÓLFUR KJALAR, "Plotinus on the object of thought", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 77, pp. 21-41, 1995.

ENGELS, FRIEDRICH, *Conditions of the working class in England*, 1845.

EPICTETUS, *The Discourses*.

ERIUGENA, JOHANNES SCOTUS, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, 1976, [fragments translated by M. L. Uhlfelder, with summaries by J. A. Potter].

—, *Periphyseon*, vol. I, II, IV, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1999, 1983, 1995, [translated by I. P. Sheldon-Williams and J. J. O'Meara].

EUCLID, *The thirteen books of Euclid's Elements translated from the text of Heiberg with introduction and commentary*, Cambridge University Press, 1925, [edited and translated by Sir T. Little Heath].

FAGIN, RONALD and HALPERN, JOSEPH Y. and MOSES, YORAM, and VARDI, MOSHE Y., *Reasoning about Knowledge*, The MIT Press, 1995.

FEUERBACH, LUDWIG, *Lectures on the Nature of Religion*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1981, [my retranslation from Polish *Wykłady o Istocie Religii*].

FICHTE, JOHANN GOTTLIEB, *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. II.

—, *The Vocation of Man*, The Open Court Publishing Company, La Salle, Illinois, 1965, [translated by W. Smith].

FIELDER, JOHN H., *Chorismos and Emanation*, in BAINE HARRIS, R. (editor), *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, vol. I, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, 1976.

FINDLAY, J. N., "Can God's existence be disproved?", *Mind*, (57), pp. 176-183, 1948.

FODOR, JERRY A., *Concepts*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

VON FRANZ, MARIE-LOUISE, *The Process of Individuation* [Part 3 in C. G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, eds., *Man and His Symbols*].

—, *Science and the Unconscious* [Conclusion in C. G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, eds., *Man and His Symbols*].

—, *On Divination and Synchronicity. The Psychology of Meaningful Chance*, Inner City Books, 1980.

FREGE, GOTTLÖB, *The concept of number*, in *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, Breslau, 1884, [translated by M. S. Mahoney, in P. Benacerraf and H. Putnam, eds., *Philosophy of Mathematics*].

—, "On Meaning and Denotation", *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, vol. NF 100, 1892, [my translation from German *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*].

—, *Review of Husserl's Philosophie der Arithmetik*, in *Translations from Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

—, *The thought: a logical inquiry*, in S. Blackburn and K. Simmons, eds., *Truth*.

FREUD, SIGMUND, *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XV, Fisher Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt a.M., 1999.

FRIDUGISUS OF TOURS, *On the Being of Nothing and Shadows* a letter to Charlemagne (according to E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*..., it is an anonymous letter addressed to Louis the Pious and to Einhard).

FURTH, MONTGOMERY, *Substance, Form and Psyche: An Aristotelean Metaphysics*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

GALEN, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* [quoted after R. L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*].

GALLAGHER, S., and MELTZOFF, A., "The earliest sense of self and others: Merleau-Ponty and recent developmental studies", *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 9 (2), pp. 213-236, 1996.

GAUNILON OF MARMOUTIERS, *On behalf of the fool*, in B. Davies and G. R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The major works*.

GEORGE, DAVID B., and FORTIN, JOHN R. (editors), *The Boethian Commentaries of Clarembald of Arras*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, [translated by the editors].

GERSON, LLOYD P., *The concept in Platonism*, in J. J. Cleary, ed., *Traditions of Platonism*.

AL GHAZALI, ABU HAMID, *There Is No evil in Allah's Perfect World*, in A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*, 2001.

GILSON, ETIENNE, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, New York, 1940.

—, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Random House, 1954.

GIRARD, JEAN-YVES, "Locus Solum: From the Rules of Logic to the Logic of Rules", *Mathematical Structures in Computer Science*, vol. 11 (3), pp. 301-506, 2001.

GOMBROWICZ, WITOLD, *The Diary*, Instytut Literacki, Paris, 1971, [my translation from Polish *Dziennik*].

—, *Cosmos*, in *Ferdydurke, Pornografia, Cosmos: Three novels by Witold Gombrowicz*, Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1978, [english version by E. Mosbacher].

—, *Trans-Atlantic*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków, 1986, [my translation from Polish].

*The Gospel of Philip*, in *Early Christian Writings*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com> [translated by W. W. Isenberg].

*The Gospel of Thomas*, in *Early Christian Writings*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com>.

GRAVES, ROBERT, and PATAI, RAPHAEL, *Hebrew Myths. The Book of Genesis*, 1964, [my retranslation from Polish *Mity hebrajskie*, Cyklady, 2002].

ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Epistles*, in *Early Christian Writings; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. XII of series II, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com>.

GRZESIUK, STANISŁAW, *Five years of KZ*, Książka i Wiedza, 1996 (1958), my translation from Polish *Pięć lat kacetu*.

GUPTA, ANIL, "Truth and paradox", *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, vol. 11, pp. 1-60, 1982.

GUPTA, ANIL, and BELNAP, NUEL, *The Revision Theory of Truth*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993.

HARRIS, GILLIAN, *Development of taste perception and appetite regulation*, in G. Bremner et al., eds., *Infant Development: Recent Advances*.

HARRIS, MARGARET, *Language and its pathology*, in G. Bremner et al., eds., *Infant Development: Recent Advances*.

HARTNER, W., *Zahlen und Zahlensysteme bei Primitiv- und Hochkulturvölkern*, in *Oriens-Occidens (collected essays)*, pp. 57-116, Hildesheim, 1968.

HEBBEL, FRIEDRICH, *Werke* [fragments in G. Sowiński, ed., *Around Nihilism*].

HEIDEGGER, MARTIN, *Augustin and Neoplatonism (early Freiburg lecture, summer 1921)* in M. Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*.

—, *Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion* in M. Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*.

—, *Philosophical Fundaments of Medieval Mysticism (notes to an undelivered lecture 1919/19)* in M. Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*.

- , *The Essence of Truth*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M., 1954, [my translation from German *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*].
- , *Being and Time*, Basil Blackwell, 1962, [translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson].
- , *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M., 1995, [my retranslation from Polish *Fenomenologia życia religijnego*, Znak 2002].

HEINZMANN, R. (editor), *The Medieval Philosophy* [my translation from Polish *Filozofia Średniowiecza*].

HENRY OF GHENT, *Quodlibet*.

—, *Summa Theologica* [fragments after A. Wolter, ed., *Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings*].

HERBERT, ZBIGNIEW, “*The prayer of the traveling Mr. Cogito*”.

—, *King of the Ants*, Wydawnictwo a5, 2001, [my translation from Polish *Król Mrówek*].

HERODOTUS, *The Histories*, Cambridge University Press, 1920, [translated and edited by A. D. Godley].

HERZBERGER, HANS, “*Notes on naive semantics*”, *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, vol. 11, pp. 61–102, 1982.

HOBES, THOMAS, *De Corpore*.

HÖLDERLIN, FRIEDRICH, *The Source of All Evil (Poems from 1795-1799)*, in LAM, ANDRZEJ (editor), *Night Wanderer; Poetries*, Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2002, [my retranslation from Polish].

HOMER, *The Iliad* [translated by S. Butler].

—, *The Odyssey* [translated by S. Butler].

HRABANUS MAURUS, *De universo*.

HUME, DAVID, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1978.

HUSSERL, EDMUND, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*, in BOEHM, RUDOLF (editor), *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10, Martinus Nijhoff, Haag, 1966, [my translation from *Zur Phänomenologie des Inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*].

—, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970, [translated by D. Carr].

—, *Ideas of Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1975, [my retranslation from Polish *Idee*].

HUTT, C., *Males and Females*, Penguin, 1972.

HUXLEY, ALDOUS, *The Perennial Philosophy*, Harper & Row, 1970.

HUYSMANS, JORIS-KARL, *A Rebours*, Bokvennen, Oslo, 1998, [Norwegian translation, *Mot strømmen*, by J. O. Gatland].

INGARDEN, ROMAN, *About Responsibility and its Ontic Foundations*, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1970, [my retranslation from Polish version included in R. Ingarden, *Książeczka o Człowieku*].

—, *The Controversy about World's Existence*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa, 1987, [my translation from Polish *Spór o Istnienie Świata*].

—, *Książeczka o Człowieku (A Booklet about Man)*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków, 1987.

ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *Etymologies*.

JAFFÉ, ANIELA, *Symbolism in the Visual Arts* [Part 4 in C. G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, eds., *Man and His Symbols*].

JAFFÉ, ANIELA (editor), *Memories, Dreams, Reflections of C. G. Jung*, (Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken von C. G. Jung), Rascher Verlag, 1963.

JAMES, WILLIAM, *Pragmatism* in W. James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*.

—, *The Principles of Psychology*, York University, Toronto, Ontario internet resource developed by Ch. D. Green.

—, “*What the Will Effects?*”, *Scribner’s Magazine*, vol. 3 (2), 1888, <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu>.

—, “*A World of Pure Experience*”, *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, vol. 1, 1904, in W. James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*.

—, *Pragmatism’s conception of truth*, in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, pp. 197-236, Longman Green and Co., 1907, in W. James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*.

—, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, in W. James, *Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe*.

—, *Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe*, Longman Green and Co., 1943.

—, *The thing and its relations*, in W. James, *Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe*, [also: Appendix A in *A Pluralistic Universe*].

—, *Essays in Pragmatism*, Hefner Publishing, New York, 1964.

—, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Penguin, 1985.

—, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, Penguin, 2000, edited by G. Gunn.

JOACHIM, H. H., *The Nature of Truth*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1906.

JOHN OF SALISBURY, *Metalogicon*, Gloucester, Mass., 1971, [translated by D. McGraw].

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, *The Poems*, A New Directions Book, New York, 1972, [translated by W. Barnstone].

JUNG, CARL GUSTAV, *Approaching the Unconscious* [Part 1 in C. G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, eds., *Man and His Symbols*].

—, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, Collected Works, vol. VIII.

—, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Collected Works, vol. XIV, Princeton University Press, 1989, [translated by R. F. C. Hull].

—, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Collected Works, vol. IX, part 1, Princeton University Press, 1990, [translated by R. F. C. Hull].

—, *The Answer to Job*, Ethos, Warszawa, 1995, [my retranslation from Polish *Odpowiedź Hiobowi*].

JUNG, CARL GUSTAV, and VON FRANZ, MARIE-LOUISE (editors), *Man and His Symbols*, Dell Publishing, New York, 1968.

ST. JUSTIN MARTYR, *Second Apology*, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I.

KANDINSKY, WASSILY, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Benteli Verlag, Bern, 1952, [my translation from German *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*].

KANT, IMMANUEL, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Philipp Reclam jun., Stuttgart, 1961, [my translations interspersed with translations by T. Kingsmill Abbott].

—, *Critique of Pure Reason*, MacMillan Publishers, 1985, [translated by N. Kemp Smith].

KANTOROWICZ, ERNST, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, Düsseldorf, 1963.

KAUFMANN, WALTER, *Nietzsche and the Seven Sirens* [introductory note to F. Nietzsche, *My Sister and I*].

KENNEY, JOHN PETER, “*Mysticism and contemplation in the Enneads*”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. LXXI (3), 1997.

KIERKEGAARD, SØREN, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Copenhagen, 1960, [my translation from Danish *Begrebet Angest*].

—, *The Concept of Irony, with Constant View to Socrates*, in *Samlede Verker*, vol. I, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Copenhagen, 1962, [my translation from Danish *Om Begrebet Ironi*].

—, *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, in *Samlede Verker*, vol. IV, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Copenhagen, 1982, [my translation from Danish *Atten opbyggelige taler*].

—, *The Sickness unto Death. A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, Penguin, 1989, [translated by A. Hannay].

KIRK, G.S. and RAVEN, J.E., and SCHOFIELD, M. (editors), *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge University Press, 1957/1983.

KOLERS, P. A., and von GRÜNAU, M., “*Shape and color in apparent motion*”, *Vision Research*, vol. 16, pp. 329-335, 1976.

KRAUS, W., *Nihilismus heute oder Die Geduld der Weltgeschichte*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt, 1985.

KUNG, JOAN, “*Can substance be predicated of matter?*”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 60, pp. 140-159, 1978.

LANDGREBE, L., *Zur Überwindung des europäischen Nihilismus*, 1947, in D. Arendt, ed., *Der Nihilismus als Phänomen der Geistesgeschichte*.

LAURENTINA, RENÉ, *Satan, a myth or reality?*, IW Pax, Warszawa, 1997, [my retranslation from Polish *Szatan, mit czy rzeczywistość?*].

LAWVERE, WILLIAM F., and SCHANUEL, STEPHEN HOEL, *Conceptual Mathematics: A First Introduction to Categories*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

LE BON, GUSTAVE, *The Crowd*, Paris, 1929, [my retranslation from Polish *Psychologia Tłumu*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986].

LEIBNIZ, GOTTFRIED WILHELM, *Correspondence with Arnauld* in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts*.

—, *Discourse on Metaphysics* in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts*.

—, *The Monadology* [translated by R. Latta].

—, *Philosophical Texts*, Oxford University Press, 1998, [translated by R. S. Woolhouse].

LESTER, D., “*Multiple personality: a review*”, *Psychology*, vol. XIV, 1977.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, CLAUDE, *The Savage Mind*, London, 1962.

—, “*Réponses à quelques questions*”, *Esprit*, (11), 1963.

—, *From Honey to Ashes*, 1966.

LÉVINAS, EMMANUEL, *L’Au-delà du verset*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1981.

LEWIS, FRANK A., *Substance and Predication in Aristotle*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

LOCKE, JOHN, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,  
<http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Philosophy/Locke/echu>.

LUCRETIUS, TITUS, *On the Nature of Things* [translated by W. E. Leonard].

LUTHER, MARTIN, *Luther's Works*, Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, American Edition, Philadelphia and St. Luis, 1955-.

MACLANE, SOUNDER, *Category Theory for the Working Mathematician*, Graduate Texts in Mathematics, Springer Verlag, 1971.

MAIMONIDES, MOSES, *Laws Concerning Character Traits* [fragments in A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*].

—, *Guide of the Perplexed*, University of Chicago Press, 1963, [translated by S. Pines].

MAINLÄNDER, PHILIPP, *Die Philosophie der Erlösung* [fragments in G. Sowiński, ed., *Around Nihilism*].

MALCOLM, N., “Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations”, *The Philosophical Review*, vol. LXIII, pp. 530-559, 1954.

—, “Anselm’s ontological arguments”, *The Philosophical Review*, vol. LXIX (1), pp. 41-62, 1960, [my retranslation from Polish].

MANDLER, JEAN M., *Development of categorisation: perceptual and conceptual categories*, in G. Bremner et al., eds., *Infant Development: Recent Advances*.

MANN, THOMAS, *Doctor Faustus*, Czytelnik, Warszawa, 1962, [my retranslation from Polish].

—, *My Times*, in ORŁOWSKI, HUBERT (editor), *Moje Czasy; Eseje*, Poznańska Biblioteka Niemiecka, 2001, [my retranslation from Polish].

MANSFELD, J., and DE RIJK, L. M. (editors), *KEPHALAION: Studies in Greek Philosophy and its Continuation Offered to Professor C. J. de Vogel*, van Gorcum & Comp. B.V., Assen, The Netherlands, 1975.

MARION, J. L., “Idol and Distance”, 1997, [fragments of *L’idole et la distance* in M.-A. Ouaknin, *Ouvertures hassidiques*].

MARLOWE, CHRISTOPHER, *Doctor Faustus*, Routledge, 1988, [edited and annotated by J. D. Jump].

MATARIC, M. J., “Behavioral synergy without explicit integration”, *SIGART Bulletin*, vol. 2 (4), pp. 130-133, 1991.

MAUSS, MARCEL, *The Gift*, Routledge, 2002, [translated by W. D. Halls].

MAY, GERHARD, “Schöpfung aus dem Nichts. Die Entstehung der Lehre von der Creatio ex Nihilo”, *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 48, pp. 63-85, 1978, [quoted after R. L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*].

MCGINN, BERNARD (editor), *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah/Toronto, 1986.

MCGINN, C., *Logical Properties*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000.

MELTZOFF, A., and MOORE, M. K., “Imitation of facial and manual gestures by human neonates”, *Science*, vol. 198, pp. 75-78, 1977.

—, “Newborn infants imitate adult facial gestures”, *Child Development*, vol. 54, pp. 702-709, 1983.

—, “Imitation in newborn infants”, *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 25, pp. 954-962, 1989.

- MERLEAU-PONTY, MAURICE, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962, [translated by C. Smith].
- , *The child's relations with others*, in *The Primacy of Perception*, Northwest University Press, 1964.
- , *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence, Signs*, Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- , *Visible and Invisible*, Editions Gallimard, 1964, [my retranslation from Polish, *Widzialne i niewidzialne*, Aletheia, 1996].
- MESSER, DAVID, *Referential communication: making sense of the social and physical worlds*, in G. Bremner et al., eds., *Infant Development: Recent Advances*.
- MIERNOWSKI, JAN, *God-Nothingness: Negative Theologies at the Threshold of Modern Times*, Polish Academy of Science, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Warszawa, 2002, [my retranslation from Polish *Bóg-Nicość: Teologie negatywne u progu czasów nowożytnych*].
- MILTON, JOHN, *Paradise Lost*, David Campbell Publishers, London, 1992.
- MINOIS, GEORGES, *The Devil*, PAX, 2001, [my retranslation from Polish *Diabeł*].
- DELLA MIRANDOLA, GIOVANNI PICO, *Conclusions or 900 Theses* [translated by S. A. Farmer].
- , *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Regnery Gateway, 1956.
- MOIR, ANNE, and JESSEL, DAVID, *Brain Sex*, Dell Publishing, New York, 1989.
- MONTAIGNE, MICHEL EYQUEM, *Of Lyers*, in *Montaigne's Essays*, I:9, [http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/Renaissance\\_Editions](http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/Renaissance_Editions) [translated by J. Florio (1603)].
- MULDOON, MARC S., “Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty on narrative identity”, *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 71 (1), pp. 1-18, 1997.
- MURRAY, ALEXANDER, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, Oxford University Press, 1978.
- MURRAY, L., “Intersubjectivity, object relations theory and empirical evidence from mother-infant interactions”, *Infant Mental Health Journal*, vol. 12, pp. 219-232, 1991.
- MURRAY, L., and THREVARTHEN, C., *Emotional regulation of interactions between two-month-olds and their mothers*, pp. 177-197, Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1985.
- NABERT, J., “An Essay on Evil”, 1970, [fragments of *Essai sur le mal* in J. Tischner, *The Controversy about Man's Existence*].
- NAGEL, T., “What is it like to be a bat?”, *Philosophical Review*, vol. 83, pp. 435-445, 1974.
- The Nyāya Sūtra* in S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, eds., *Indian Philosophy*, X:A.
- NICHOLAS OF CUSA, *Dialogue on the Hidden God* in Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*.
- , *On Sacred Ignorance* in Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*.
- , *On Wisdom and Knowledge*, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 1996, [translated by J. Hopkins, from *Idiota de Sapienta*].
- , *Selected Spiritual Writings*, Paulist Press, 1997, [translated by H. L. Bond].
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDRICH, *Human, All Too Human*, <http://www.publicappeal.org/library/nietzsche> [translated by H. Zimmern (1909-1913)].
- , *Nietzsche on Parmenides*, <http://www.publicappeal.org/library/nietzsche>.
- , *Notes about Nihilism (from years 1885-1889*, in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.

- , *On the Genealogy of Morals*, <http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/onthe.html>.
- , *Beyond Good and Evil*, Penguin, 1973, [translated by R. J. Hollingdale].
- , *My Sister and I*, AMOK Books, 1990.
- , *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Penguin, 1994, [translated by W. Kaufmann].
- OCKHAM, WILLIAM, *Commentary on the ‘Sentences’*.
- , *Ordinatio*.
- , *Quaestiones in lib. I Physicorum* [fragments in P. Boehner, ed., *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*].
- , *Quodlibeta* [fragments in P. Boehner, ed., *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*].
- , *Summa totius logicae* [fragments in P. Boehner, ed., *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*].
- ORIGEN, *Against Celsus*, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV.
- OTTO, RUDOLF, *The Mysticism of East and West*, Leopold Klotz Verlag, Gotha, 1929, [my retranslation from Polish].
- , *The Idea of the Holy [Das Heilige]*, Verlag C. H. Beck, München, 1963.
- OUAKNIN, MARC-ALAIN, *Ouvertures hassidiques*, J. Grancher, 1990, [my retranslation from Polish *Chasydzi*, Cyklady, 2002].
- OVID, *Amores*.
- PASCAL, BLAISE, *Pensées* [transalted by W. F. Trotter].
- PERL, ERIC D., “*The One as pure giving in Plotinus*”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. LXXI (3), 1997.
- PESSIN, SARAH, “*Matter, metaphor, and privative pointing: Maimonides on the complexity of human being*”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. LXXVI (1), 2002.
- PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *On the Creation*, in BOHN, H. G. (editor), *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, London, 1854-1890, [translated by Charles Duke Yonge].
- PIAGET, JEAN, *The Construction of Reality in the Child*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1954.
- , *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood*, Norton, New York, 1962.
- , *Memory and Intelligence*, Basic Books, New York, 1973.
- PIERCE, CHARLES S., “*Some consequences of four incapacities*”, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 140-157, 1868, [page references in the text to P. P. Wiener, ed., *Charles S. Pierce: Selected Writings*].
- , “*Critical Review of Berkeley’s idealism*”, *North American Review*, vol. 93, pp. 449-472, 1871, [page references in the text to P. P. Wiener, ed., *Charles S. Pierce: Selected Writings*].
- , “*The fixation of belief*”, *Popular Science Monthly*, vol. 12, pp. 1-15, 1877, [page references in the text to P. P. Wiener, ed., *Charles S. Pierce: Selected Writings*].
- , “*What is pragmatism*”, *The Monist*, vol. 15, pp. 161-181, 1905, [page references in the text to P. P. Wiener, ed., *Charles S. Pierce: Selected Writings*].
- PLATO, *Parmenides*, <http://classics.mit.edu> [translated by B. Jowett].
- , *Phaedrus*, <http://www.textkit.com> [translated by B. Jowett].
- , *Republic*, <http://classics.mit.edu> [translated by B. Jowett].

- , *Timaeus*, <http://classics.mit.edu> [translated by B. Jowett].
- , *Letters*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1987, [my retranslation from Polish].
- PLOTINUS, *Enneads* [translated by S. MacKenna and B. S. Page; although considered dated and inferior to the newer translation by A. H. Armstrong, this one is in public domain].
- PORPHYRY, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of his Work* [translated by S. MacKenna].
- , *Porphyry's Against the Christians, the Literary Remains*, Prometheus Books, New York, 1994, [edited and translated by R. J. Hoffmann].
- PROCLUS, *Platonic Theology*, Selene Books, New York, 1995, [translated by T. Taylor, 1816].
- , *Elements of Theology*, Akme, Warszawa, 2002, [my retranslation from Polish].
- PROUST, MARCEL, “John Ruskin”, 1900-1904, in M. Proust, *Memory and Style*.
- , “Against Sainte-Beuve”, 1908, in M. Proust, *Memory and Style*.
- , *Memory and Style*, Znak, Kraków, 2000, [my retranslation from Polish *Marcel Proust: Pamięć i styl*].
- QUINT, J., and KOCH, J. (editors), *Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart/Berlin, 1936-.
- RADHAKRISHNAN, SERVEPALLI, “An Idealist View of Life”, 1988.
- RADHAKRISHNAN, SERVEPALLI, and MOORE, CHARLES A. (editors), *Indian Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, 1957.
- RAUSCHNING, HERMANN, *Masken und Metamorphosen des Nihilismus*, 1955.
- REDDY, VASUDEVI and HAY, DALE and MURRAY, LYNNE, and TREVARTHEN, COLWYN, *Communication in infancy: mutual regulation of affect and attention*, in G. Bremner *et al.*, eds., *Infant Development: Recent Advances*.
- RICH, A. N. M., “The Platonic idea as thoughts of God”, *Mnemosyne*, vol. 4 (7), pp. 123-133, 1954.
- RICOEUR, PAUL, “Life: a story in search of a narrator”, *Facts and Values*, vol. 10, pp. 121-132, 1986.
- RILKE, REINER MARIA, *Das Stunden-Buch*, <http://rainer-maria-rilke.de>.
- , *Es winkt zu Fühlung...*, <http://rainer-maria-rilke.de>, 1914.
- ROBERTS, ALEXANDER, and DONALDSON, JAMES (editors), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I-VIII,X, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Edinburgh, American edition by A. Cleveland Coxe, in *Early Chrstian Writings*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com>, 1884-86.
- RORTY, AMÉLIE OKSENBERG, “How to harden your heart: six easy ways to become corrupt”, *Yale Review*, 1998, in A. O. Rorty, ed., *The Many Faces of Evil*.
- RORTY, AMÉLIE OKSENBERG (editor), *The Many Faces of Evil*, Routledge, London, 2001.
- RORTY, RICHARD, *The Pragmatist's Progress* in S. Collini, ed., *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*.
- , *Genus as matter: a reading of Metaphysics Z-H*, in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, pp. 393-420, Van Gorcum, Assen, The Netherlands, 1973.
- , *Pragmatism, Davidson, and truth*, in LEPORE, E. (editor), *Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 333-355, Blackwell, 1986, [also in S. Blackburn and K. Simmons, eds., *Truth*].

- , *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- DE SADE, DONATIEN ALPHONSE FRANÇOISE, *Fragments* [various Internet resources].
- , *The 120 Days of Sodom*, supervert.com, 2002, [translated by R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse].
- , *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, supervert.com, 2002, [translated by R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse].
- SALOMÉ, LOU, *Nietzsche*, University of Illinois Press, 2001, [translated and edited by S. Mandel].
- , *You Alone are Real to Me – Remembering Rainer Maria Rilke*, BOA Editions Ltd., 2003, [translated by A. von der Lippe].
- SANTOGROSSI, ANSGAR, “*Duns Scotus on potency opposed to act in Questions on the Metaphysics, IX*”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. LXVII (1), 1993.
- SARTRE, JEAN-PAUL, *The Transcendence of the Ego. An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York [translated by F. Williams, Forrest and R. Kirkpatrick].
- , *Being and Nothingness*, Washington Square Press, 1966, [translated by Hazel E. Barnes].
- SCALTSAS, THEODORE, *Substances and Universals in Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, Cornell University Press, 1994.
- SCHAFF, PHILIP (editor), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I & II, New York, in *Early Chrstian Writings*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com>, 1886.
- SCHELER, MAX, *Resentment in the Building of Morals*, in *Vom Umsturz der Werte, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, Bern, 1955, [my retranslation from Polish *Resentyment a Moralność, Czytelnik, 1997*].
- , *Repentance and Rebirth*, in *Vom Ewigen in Menschen, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, Francke Verlag, Bern und München, 5 , 1968, [my translation from German *Reue und Wiedergeburt*].
- , *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Francke Verlag, Bern und München, 6 , 1980, [my translation from German *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*].
- , *The Nature of Sympathy*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa, 1986, [my retranslation from Polish *Istota i Formy Sympatii*].
- , *Anthropological Writings*, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1994, [my translation from German *Schriften zur Anthropologie*].
- SCHOLEM, GERSHOM, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem, 1941.
- SCHWYZER, HANS-RUDOLF, *The intellect in Plotinus and the archetypes of C. G. Jung* in J. Mansfeld and L. M. de Rijk, eds., *KEPHALAION: Studies in Greek Philosophy and its Continuation Offered to Professor C. J. de Vogel*.
- SEIDLER, EDUARD, “*Der Neugeborenversuch Friedrichs II von Hohenstaufen*”, *Deutsche Ärztblatt*, (39), 1964.
- SENECA, LUCIUS ANNAEUS, *By Way of Abstract*.
- , *Natural questions*.
- SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM, *As You Like It*, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/modeng/modengS/browse.html>.
- , *Hamlet*, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.
- SILVERMAN, HUGH J. (editor), *Piaget, Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Northwestern University Press, 1980.

SLATER, ALAN, *Visual perception and its organisation in early infancy*, in G. Bremner *et al.*, eds., *Infant Development: Recent Advances*.

SLATER, ALAN, and BUTTERWORTH, GEORGE, *Perception of social stimuli: face perception and imitation*, in G. Bremner *et al.*, eds., *Infant Development: Recent Advances*.

SMAGA, J., *The Birth and Fall of the Empire, CCCP 1917-1991*, Kraków my translation from Polish *Narodziny i Upadek Imperium*.

SOKOŁOWSKI, ROBERT, *The God of Faith and Reason*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1982.

SOWIŃSKI, GRZEGORZ (editor), *Around Nihilism*, Wydawnictwo A, 2001, [my retranslation from Polish *Wokół nihilizmu*].

SPENCER-BROWN, G., *Laws of Form*, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., London, 1969.

SPINOZA, BARUCH, *Ethics*, Hafner Press, New York, 1949, [edited by J. Gutmann].

STERN, WILLIAM, "Psychische Präsenzzeit", *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, vol. XIII, pp. 325-349, 1897.

VON STEUBEN, HANS (editor), *Parmenides: Über das Sein*, Philipp Reclam Jun., Stuttgart, 1981.

STOCKER, MICHAEL, "Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology", *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LXXVI (12), 1979.

STRYK, LUCIEN, and IKEMOTO, TAKASHI (editors), *Zen Poetry*, Penguin, 1981.

SZAHAJ, ANDRZEJ, *Irony and Love; The Neopragmatism of Richard Rorty's in the Context of the Discussion about Postmodernism*, Fundacja Na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 1996, [my retranslation from Polish *Ironia i Miłość*].

SZCZERBA, WOJCIECH, *The Concept of Eternal Return in Early Christian Thought*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2001, [my translation from Polish *Koncepcja wiecznego powrotu w myśli wcześniechrześcijańskiej*].

TARSKI, ALFRED, "The semantical conception of truth", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 4, pp. 13-47, 1944.

*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Stanford University Press, 1989, [translated by M. G. Kovacs].

*Theologia Germanica*, Golden Treasury Series, 1874 (version reprinted in 1893), [translated by S. Winkworth].

THOMPSON, W. D. J. CARGILL, *Luther and the right of resistance to the emperor*, in BAKER, DEREK (editor), *Church, Society and Politics*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1975.

TILLICH, PAUL, *The Question about the Unconditional*, Evangelisches Verlagswerk Stuttgart, 1964, [*Die Frage nach dem Unbedingten, Schriften zur Religionsphilosophie*].

—, *What is religion?*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1969.

TISCHNER, JÓZEF, *The Controversy about Man's Existence*, Znak, Kraków, 2001, [my translation from Polish *Spór o Istnienie Człowieka*].

TOULMIN, STEPHEN, *Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts*, Princeton University Press, 1972.

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT, Dolman, London, 1848, [edited and translated by J. Waterworth].

DE UNAMUNO, MIGUEL, *Tragic Sense of Life*, Dover Publications, 1954, [translated by J. E. Crawford Flitch].

VALERY, PAUL, *Estampes de Corot*, Éditions de Bibliothèques Nationales, 1932, [my retranslation from Polish].

VIRGIL, *The Aeneid*, Litrix Reading Room, <http://www.litrix.com>, 2003, [translated by J. Dryden].

VAN DER WAALS, H. G., and ROELOFS, C. O., "Optische Scheinbewegung", *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie des Sinnesorgane*, vol. 114/115, pp. 241-288/91-190, 1931.

WALSHE, M. O'C. (editor), *Meister Eckhart: German Sermons and Treatises*, Element Books, London and Dulverton, 1985.

WEIL, SIMONE, *Waiting for God*, Perennial Classics, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2001, [translated by E. Craufurd].

WERTHEIMER, M., "Experimentelle Studien über das Sehen von Bewegung", *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, vol. 61, pp. 161-265, 1912.

WIENER, PHILIP P. (editor), *Charles S. Pierce: Selected Writings*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1958.

WILKEN, ROBERT L., *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, Yale University Press, 1984.

WILLATTS, PETER, *Beyond the 'Couch Potato' infant: how infants use their knowledge to regulate action, solve problems, and achieve goals*, in G. Bremner et al., eds., *Infant Development: Recent Advances*.

WITTGENSTEIN, LUDWIG, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell Publishing, 1953 (2001), [translated by G. E. M. Anscombe].

—, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Blackwell, 1956, [edited by G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe].

—, *Philosophical Remarks*, 1968, [translated by G. E. M. Anscombe].

—, *On Certainty*, Basil Blackwell, 1969, [Über Gewissheit, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (editors), translated by G. E. M. Anscombe and D. Paul].

—, *Culture and Value*, Blackwell, 1980, [edited by Georg H. von Wright].

—, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and Henley, 1981, [translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness].

WOLFSON, HARRY, *Philo*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1947.

WOLICKI, K., "Convictions of the theatre of counterculture (2)", *Dialog*, (1), 1977, [my translation from Polish *Przeświadczenie teatru kontrkultury*].

WOLTER, ALLAN (editor), *Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, [translated by the editor].

YATES, FRANCES, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Routledge Classics, 1979.

—, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, 1991 [1964].

ZELLER, E., *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, Meridian Books, New York, 1960.