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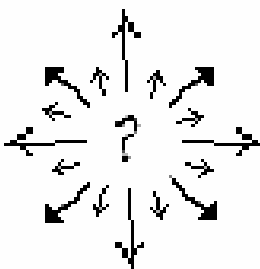
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# **PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF TIME AND MEMORY**

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## **The Chasm of Memory: Collective Memory between Personal Experience and Historical Representation**

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The past decades have witnessed a marked growth in preoccupation with the theme of memory, not only in the immediate sphere of personal life, but above all as it is extended to encompass collective experience. This concern with the phenomenon of collective memory has not always led, however, to its clarification. Collective memory is thought to be something "more" than a conglomeration of personal memories which compose it. Yet, each of us, each individual in every society, remembers from a personal point of view. And if there is memory beyond personal experience through which collective identities are configured, in what "place" can one legitimately situate it? In recent years, the attempt to situate collective memory has often been resolved by stretching its semantic reference to make it a near synonym of "history" or historical tradition. Here memory is not merely employed as a metaphor for history, it becomes the near equivalent of historical representation.

In the brief discussion that follows, I will argue in favor of the autonomy of collective memory, beyond the singular perspective of the personal memories which comprise it and at the same time quite different from historical representation with which it is often conflated. My analysis

will draw support from theoretical explorations of the phenomenon of collective memory in the pioneering work of thinkers like Walter Benjamin and Maurice Halbwachs. In referring to the phenomenon of "collective memory" each of these thinkers was careful to distinguish it from personal reminiscence, on one hand, and from "history" on the other.<sup>1</sup> How then might we situate the "place" of collective memory in the chasm between personal experience and historical representation?

Let us begin with a closer examination of the idea of personal memory, above all its role in constituting personal identity. By qualifying this idea, and especially its limits, we will be able to bring into view the contours of what might be termed collective memory. In order to proceed with our investigation we will take a step backward toward the philosophical theory which has been a principal source of the modern conception of reflexion on the question of personal memory: the reflexion by John Locke in his epoch making work *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, first published in 1690. Locke's theory of memory, we recall, introduced the empiricist concept of personal identity which, in modified form, has continued to exercise a decisive influence on psychological theories which derive memory from the personal sphere. It is precisely the difficulty inherent in this theory which helps situate the "place" of collective memory beyond the confines of personal identity.

Locke introduced his novel theory of personal identity in the second edition of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, in Book II, chapter 27, entitled "Of Identity and Diversity". This theory arose from Locke's challenge to substantialist theories of human identity inherited from modern metaphysical orientations beginning with Descartes. For each of these orientations, from Descartes, to Spinoza and Leibniz, personal identity is grounded in a substantial foundation of the self, whether the Cartesian *res*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire", "Der Erzähler", *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980); Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en terre sainte. Étude de mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1941).

*cogitans*, Spinoza's *mens humana*, a moment of the infinite understanding of God, or the Leibnizian monad. By contrast, Lockean empiricism, in limiting the scope of human understanding to the domain of experience and of reflexion on experience, placed in doubt the intelligibility of such a substantial foundation to human identity, which is nowhere given in experience. Self-knowledge has nothing to do with a comprehension of substance, but is limited to the *experience* we have of ourselves, presented in self-consciousness: it arises from the possibility for each intelligent being, as Locke wrote in the *Essay*, II, 27, § 9, to "consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places ..." "... as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person ..." <sup>2</sup> Thus it is on the basis of consciousness of myself reaching back to encompass the different moments of experience that I configure myself as a unity; on the basis of memory of myself in the past, I know myself to be the same at different times and in different places.

What concerns us in regard to Locke's theory is above all its radicalism. Locke's tendency to limit identity of the self to *consciousness* of the self leads him to exclude all that is not consciously thought from exercising a role in the constitution of the person. Personal identity concerns present consciousness which, thanks to memory, envelops the diverse moments of a past experience.

Locke himself was quite aware of the difficulties to which his radicalism led, particularly the moral dilemma posed by lapses of consciousness. But he steadily insisted, in the chapter "Of Identity and Diversity", that moral responsibility ultimately depends on the *consciousness* we have of our acts, hence on the empirical identity of the one who acts. This explains why we do not hold children or madmen responsible for their misdeeds in the same way we would a rational adult, and we even judge acts committed by inebriated individuals less harshly than those committed with premeditation by persons in full possession of their faculties.

Here is not the place to dwell on the lively debates that have been fueled by Locke's thesis up until the present day. I will rather focus on one

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<sup>2</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p. 302.

important critique that has been leveled against this theory that will lead us to reconsider the status of memory - its rootedness in a fundamental plurality - beyond the limits of individual memory in the Lockean sense. I refer to the famous critique of the Lockean theory of personal identity enunciated by the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid in his work *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, published in 1785. Here Reid wrote:

"Suppose a brave officer to have been flogged when a boy at school for robbing an orchard, to have taken a standard from the enemy in his first campaign, and to have been made a general in advanced life; suppose also ... that, when he took the standard, he was conscious of his having been flogged at school, and that, when made a general, he was conscious of his taking the standard, but had absolutely lost the consciousness of his flogging ... it follows, from Mr. Locke's doctrine, that he who was flogged at school is the same person who took the standard, and that he who took the standard is the same person who was made a general. Whence it follows, if there be any truth in logic, that the general is the same person with him who was flogged at school. But the general's consciousness does not reach as far back as his flogging; therefore according to Mr. Locke's doctrine he is not the same person who was flogged. Therefore, the general is, and at the same time is not, the same person with him who was flogged at school."<sup>3</sup>

As Reid emphasized in his analysis, the person who took the standard, according to Locke's reasoning, is the same as the one who was flogged at school. The person who took the standard is the same as the one who became a general; however, since the consciousness of the general does not reach back to encompass the memory of punishment he suffered as a young schoolboy, we cannot conclude that he is the same person. Since later in life this event has become obscure to him, we can no longer consider that it is constitutive of his identity. For Reid, this conclusion seemed bereft of all logic.

In terms of this reasoning, Reid advances an important argument concerning memory: even those of our acts and experiences of which we have lost consciousness continue to *belong* to us and to constitute our identity. I would like, however, to point out that this conclusion is by no

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, in Noonan, *Personal Identity*, p. 66-67.



means self-evident. The question might legitimately be raised concerning the status of these acts and experiences of which we are oblivious and the role of the forgotten past in constituting present identity. Or, to reformulate our question in terms of Reid's example: if no one who witnessed the flogging of the schoolboy remains alive, if since that time the school has burned down and, with it, every trace of the sorry event, in what sense does it belong to the personal identity of the general?

Nowadays we generally give two types of answers to this question. The first, which is based on moral considerations, was already stated by Reid: the simple fact that we no longer remember what we have done does not dispense us from moral responsibility for our acts. Experiences and acts continue to constitute our moral identity even after we have forgotten them. The second type of response, which became a central topic of investigation in the 20th century, places particular emphasis on the *involuntary* return of long forgotten and unexpected reminiscence in the delineation of personal identity. Walter Benjamin underlined this aspect of memory - the "*mémoire involontaire*" depicted by Marcel Proust in *A la recherche du temps perdu*:

"We are only what we possess, we only possess what is really present, and so many of our remembrances, of our moods, of our ideas embark on voyages far away from us, and we lose sight of them! We are unable to account for them in that totality making up our being. But they find their secret paths to return within us."<sup>4</sup>

Pursuing an analogous assumption, the psychoanalytic theory of unconscious memory has led us to recognize how important forgotten, or repressed experiences are in the constitution of identity. And it is the work of the theoretician to retrieve and re-elaborate memory that has been suppressed in this manner.

In each of these two cases, the juridico-moral and the psychological,

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<sup>4</sup> Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, tome 3 (Paris: Gallimard, Edition de la Pléiade), p. 488. "On n'est que par ce qu'on possède, on ne possède que ce qui vous est réellement présent, et tant de nos souvenirs, de nos humeurs, de nos idées partent faire des voyages loin de nous-même, où nous les perdons de vue! Alors nous ne pouvons plus les faire entrer en ligne de compte dans ce total qui est notre être. Mais ils ont des chemins secrets pour rentrer en nous ..."

we recognize the limits of individual consciousness, nourished by memory, as a source of personal identity. In each case it is the *other* who restores my memory and delineates the contours of my personal identity, either as a witness to my forgotten past or as a therapist who brings me to restore what has been lost. In each of these cases experience, even long forgotten or apparently obliterated experience, may retain a deeper significance as recollections which "find their secret paths to return within us".

Such reflections indicate ways in which memory may be constitutive of identity even where it is virtual and no longer explicitly recalled. And this brings us to the decisive point: If virtual memory depends on the *other* to resuscitate and revivify it, does it not refer us to a tacit locus of experience, an extra-individual, meta-personal dimension of our being to which (borrowing Proust's metaphor) "our ideas may voyage"? Where experience - and with it memory and oblivion - are *shared* by a group, the identification of this meta-personal aspect of experience allows us to ascribe a certain autonomy to group identities, a source of cohesiveness interweaving group identity amid the diversity and particularity it encompasses. It is in this sense that Walter Benjamin analyses the "mémoire involontaire" not simply in terms of the return of forgotten personal memories, but above all as an interweaving of "certain contents of the individual past with those of the collectivity".<sup>5</sup> Where group identities are confirmed through personal experience and the recollections (and fantasies) which nourish it, this collective dimension of experience is never reducible to an agglomeration of personal perspectives. Hence, shared memory is not only communicated from a personal perspective, but personal memory and personal identity are interwoven with different spheres of group existence at their very roots. The cohesiveness of group experience and of collective memory (and fantasy) sustaining it comes most immediately to light in collective traumas as in repressed group aspirations. Here in the sphere of virtual and implicit experience we begin to discern the contours of a collective memory and of a group identity which is qualitatively different from personal recollection. Far from arising in the privacy of a pre-symbolic sphere, collective memory is articulated as

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<sup>5</sup> "Wo Erfahrung im strikten Sinn obwaltet, treten im Gedächtnis gewisse Inhalte der individuellen Vergangenheit mit solchen der kollektiven in Konjunktion"; Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire", *Illuminationen*, p.189.

immediately symbolic and communicable experience, pregnant with interpersonal significance.

The difficulty in situating the "place" of collective memory which we noted at the outset of our discussion stems from the difference in levels of its articulation, ranging from the intimate experience of families and other smaller groups to the broadly diffused reminiscences that are publicly witnessed and may become the object of commemorations and historical accounts long after living members of a society can recall them. In the articulation of collective memory, the role of smaller groups such as families is rather clear-cut, as is shown by Halbwach's discussions of them in works such as *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. On the other hand, recollection which is invested with a public significance - what we may refer to as "public memory" - is far more difficult to delineate and poses a particular problem for any discussion of the "place" of collective memory. Since it may provide content both for historical representation and for political commemoration, it is particularly important for indicating the distinction between collective memory and historical representation which we underlined at the outset of our discussion.

Under the heading of public memory I understand publicly significant events which members of a society have experienced and can recall. In such cases collective recollection recalls events that have been witnessed and which, as source of political transformations, have often had a powerful impact on the constitution of the public sphere. Such recollections, however, as significant as they may be for the elaboration of public identities, are only rarely an object of *direct* experience. I myself lived in the United States during the difficult period of the Vietnam War, but my "experience" of that trying event was essentially limited to a viewing of war films diffused by the media and to conversations I had with war veterans. But even where we are dealing with a soldier who participated directly in the combat, to what extent might we claim that his remembrances, gravitating between the particularity of personal experience and the experience of his immediate peer group, corresponded to politically significant "experience"? It is here that we can appreciate the enormous distance between public memory and other spheres of more limited group and personal memory which are far more accessible to direct recollection and to indirect restitution by others. To a certain extent, of course, the diffuse quality of public memory

corresponds to a recollection which may fall into oblivion in Reid's sense, and which might be restored to remembrance through testimony. Yet there is also an irreducible distinction between public memory and all other levels of remembrance: acts and events in the public sphere are of such an order of complexity that their significance can hardly be accounted for on the basis of the personal recollection of a given set of individuals or even of a determinate group. The significance of public acts and events depends less on a series of personal recollections that might be gathered than on the symbolic configuration of the *coherence* of the larger web of testimonies and other original traces, from which remembered experience draws its specifically *public* scope. Where public memory, even though it is "experienced", remains indirect and fragmentary, it nevertheless retains a vivacity and an immediacy distinguishing it from historical representation. Historical representation is not "memory" in any but a metaphorical sense; it is at best, a "borrowed memory", according to Halbwachs' apt expression.<sup>6</sup>

This discussion leads us, in conclusion, to reflect on the paradoxical

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, p. 98-99. "Dans le cours de ma vie, le groupe national dont je faisais partie a été le théâtre d'un certain nombre d'événements dont je dis que je me souviens, mais que je n'ai connus que par les journaux ou par les témoignages de ceux qui y furent directement mêlés. Ils occupent une place dans la mémoire de la nation. Mais je n'y ai pas assisté moi-même. Quand je les évoque, je suis obligé de m'en remettre entièrement à la mémoire des autres, qui ne vient pas ici compléter ou fortifier la mienne, mais qui est la source unique de ce que j'en veux répéter. Je ne les connais souvent pas mieux ni autrement que les événements anciens, qui se sont produits avant ma naissance. Je porte avec moi un bagage de souvenirs historiques, que je peux augmenter par la conversation ou par la lecture. Mais c'est là une mémoire empruntée et qui n'est pas la mienne. Dans la pensée nationale, ces événements ont laissé une trace profonde, non seulement parce que les institutions en ont été modifiées, mais parce que la tradition en subsiste très vivante dans telle ou telle région du groupe, parti politique, province, classe professionnelle ou même dans telle ou telle famille et chez certains hommes qui en ont connu personnellement les témoins. Pour moi, ce sont des notions, des symboles; il se représentent à moi sous une forme plus ou moins populaire; je peux les imaginer; il m'est bien impossible d'en souvenir".

character of collective memory in its public scope. In our contemporary world, despite the immediacy of media coverage, the gap between personal experience and the public realm has tended to widen. With the multiplication of political agents in our mass societies, as Alexis de Tocqueville already anticipated in *Democracy in America*,<sup>7</sup> the centers of political action become ever more diffuse, creating an ever larger chasm between political events and those who seek to recall and explain them. On one hand, public remembrance serves as a primary vehicle for political identification; on the other hand, the events on which remembrance focuses become ever more elusive as concrete contents of representation. It is perhaps this paradox which accounts for the ever growing proliferation of monuments and archives seeking to collect and to preserve traces of public memory. They provide the best possibility to reinforce the precarious ties between personal experience and the public sphere of political action which has become opaque.

This quest has its own inherent dangers. Where memory is assigned a task it cannot hope to fulfill, that of bridging the abyss between personal identity and a mass public, this may lead in extreme forms to a denial of the reality of events which recollection cannot hope to fathom. Where the many layered complexity of the public sphere is forgotten, fragmented recollections may all too readily be manipulated to promote the illusion that

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard/Folio, 1961), p. 122: "Je suis très convaincu que, chez les nations démocratiques elles-mêmes, le génie, les vices ou les vertus de certains individus retardent ou précipitent le cours naturel de la destinée du peuple; mais ces sortes de causes fortuites et secondaires sont infiniment plus variées, plus cachées, plus compliquées, moins puissantes, et par conséquent plus difficiles à démêler et à suivre dans des temps d'égalité que dans des siècles d'aristocratie, où il ne s'agit que d'analyser, au milieu des faits généraux, l'action particulière d'un seul homme ou de quelques-uns. L'historien se fatigue bientôt d'un pareil travail; son esprit se perd au milieu de ce labyrinthe, et, ne pouvant parvenir à apercevoir clairement et à mettre suffisamment en lumière les influences individuelles, il les nie. Il préfère nous parler du naturel des races, de la constitution physique du pays, ou de l'esprit de la civilisation. Cela abrège son travail, et, à moins de frais, satisfait mieux le lecteur".

they are direct "experiences", capable of symbolically configuring the coherence of events as a whole. The abyss between memory and political reality is all too readily filled by fictional representation of public identity in the guise of political myths which have become an all too familiar facet of our contemporary political world.

# Emmanuel Levinas: Time and Responsibility

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*The present paper aims to view three ways of thinking time by Levinas. The following analysis reorders and interprets what he has said. The text does not make any other claims but aims to offer a possible reading of Levinas's philosophy.*

## Existential time

To be or not to be, i.e., a question about life and death, is raised daily and hourly within existential time. This is a question about survival. It is possible due to the dialectics of being and nothingness. In this struggle where the whole is at stake, in this becoming, which is also the drama of getting older, the last word still inevitably belongs to death. Death makes ridiculous and irrelevant free existence in its persistence to be, in its choice to live, and to preserve itself. In a certain sense, life is a support of life; that is, the resistance against annihilation. Survival is carried out through engulfing the other in the identity of the Ego; however, how long and until which moment? Are not all attempts to avoid death in vain? Finally, does not nothingness triumph over every effort to perpetuate a finite being? There is no big difference whether a human being is struggling against nothingness with a minute advantage over the others and with his face turned towards the future since the future of any future is death; or it runs, focused on the receding past, on the ruins left after death in such a way that death stabs him in the back; or cling to the present, to the passing moment, which cannot be stopped, but immediately disappears in the abyss of nothingness. Postponing the death moment, no matter whether by heroic, nostalgic, or well calculated behavior - this delay, in which life of the finite being is lived, is existential time.

Levinas is absolutely clear that nobody knows when death will come. Ego cannot grasp the moment of its own death. It overcomes the scope of its possibilities. Death is not what Heidegger calls "possibility of impos-

sibility”, but what Levinas calls “impossibility of any possibility”. Death seems to come from an agency over which Ego has no control. Death is the threat that approaches us inevitably. Time that separates Ego from death, that is, existential time, gets thinner in the course of life. Life is passing in spite of the whole activity of the Ego dedicated to self-preservation. In this opposition to transience, Ego cannot make the last step, cannot cover the last distance to the end and cannot witness the last moment, that of the surprise, as if the bonny hand of death has grabbed it out of nothingness. In this way consciousness disappears as if death has made a leap to the Ego. As if death comes from a direction opposite to the direction of time and Ego is confused in its project about the future by this counter movement of death, by the inevitability approaching it with its absolute otherness. Fear of death is the fear of violence of the other exercised on the Ego - fear of the absolutely unpredictable. The individual has its time due to the awareness of this compulsion, of this condemnation, of this tyranny. “Inevitability is at the same time threat and reprieve. It suppresses and liberates time. Timely being, that is, a being which is doomed to death, but still has some time, is being towards death.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, death is not just one moment - the last moment when the individual surrenders as a whole, but is the mode of his existence when “to be” means “to die.”<sup>2</sup> And the exceptionality of the instant of death, when all the resources for keeping life are exhausted, is the end of the subject’s power.

However, consciousness of the remaining time, of the time when the Ego still is capable, still has energy, allows a postponement of violence. Resistance against death’s triumph - foreseeing, ambush, cunning, as well as all tactics and strategies targeting immortality - is possible thanks to consciousness. Human freedom and human culture exist thanks to consciousness. To be a conscious, free being, means, according to Levinas, to take into account the otherness, future, death. This means to have time in order to forestall your own defeat and to be aware that freedom is under threat,

<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas. *Totalite et infini*, (Hague: Kluwer Academic, 1971), 261-262

<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas. *Dieu, la mort et le temps*, (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1993), 54



to take measures of precaution, to anticipate the moment of inhumanity, to avoid it. However, is not this utopia? How to avoid the unavoidable?

### **Historical time**

Consciousness, which is pure and simple thinking (even when it is thinking about thinking itself) remains ineffective against the brutal force imposed over a single human being by much more powerful sources. The single human being resorts to unification and system, to a certain organization of nature and society, i.e., to an order filled with sense, which is opposed to coercion and helping the struggle for delaying the supreme violence. Individual freedom which imagines that it can blow like wind in any direction it wants is a vain illusion. True freedom, i.e., implemented in the world, survives only through the creation and maintenance of socio-political institutions. Human will opposes violence and its absurdity through cultivating arbitrariness in freedom. Freedom interferes in reality if it seals its decisions on the stone of tables, in the written text of laws, in technologies and instruments, in social institutions, in the organization of the current life. By the techniques of politics, economy, law and so on, time is earned for postponing the last day. The conscious being invests in a social system in order to get insurance against death, although with temporary policy. Will trusts assessments according to universal laws that are embodied in a system of institutions and human interactions. There it seeks protection in its resistance against death. It hopes to receive an objective judgment from a public assessment concerning its meaning. Such a meaning is historical.

However, the sentence of History, as Levinas puts it, is always read extramurally. Free will is not present at the reading of this judgment, i.e., it is present but only in third person - with no opportunity to speak on its own behalf, with no right to defense. In history, man is evaluated regarding what he has done, regarding the heritage he has left. Being judged in view of the results of his activity, man in his humanity is desacralized, estranged from himself, reified. Human is made profane. History shows no respect to the one judged by it depriving the individual of the right to defense because it objectivizes him. Man is reduced to his social role and is assessed in accordance to it: "he was a good father, professional, public figure, ..." i.e., this is always man "in his quality of ..." Human beings are relevant as personifications of historical roles played in a drama whose author is

somebody else. Man is mummified in the tomb of already dead wills and his sarcophagus is one among many others. In the pantheon of historical memory, human beings are identified by a view that considers and assesses them from a position of a living one who has survived the dead. This is the reason why, in Levinas' opinion, there is always nostalgia for cynicism in history. In front of the view flying over historical events, elevated to the rank of facts, of something left behind, they become an object of investigation, of being witnessed, something proved in order afterwards to be united in historical narration. Thanks to it, it seems that history is like a chain of events with a beginning, middle, and end that has been developed rationally. Only from the perspective of a narrator who places existential times into the whole of history and divides it into periods according to the past, present and future, only from the point of view of "an objective viewer" who speaks and judges from a supra-temporal position encompassing history as totality, is it possible to speak about the meaning of historical becoming.

### **Ethical question asks about meaning and not about being**

However, is it the case that the only rationality for what is happening depends simply on testimonies and proofs, on obvious matters and investigations? Do testimonies and proofs show the sense and meaning of events and actions? The true meaning of rights requires the suspected to be called on and listened to. He is in the beginning of the trial and is the most responsible. The Self carries a responsibility that cannot be transferred to someone else - to the Third one or to the institution, state, collective, circumstances, chance, ... Justification is expected from the summoned. His position is originally apologetic. At any court, the issue of arbitrariness, i.e., of restrictions over freedom, is considered. Freedom needs to be justified. My freedom understood as the spontaneity of my decisions, as persistence to be Ego, my assessment about things, which the unlimited scope of arbitrariness can quote, is shaken in the situation of judging. The Court encourages the Ego to respond on his own behalf. The verdict is accepted by him in the degree request is interiorized and consciousness looks for replies. Then the question is not only whether to be or not to be, as it is put in ontology and dialectics, but whether I have a right to be. Indeed, whether I have a right to be that which I am? Or that which I want to be? Or that what I choose to be? This

question, says Levinas, is against nature, against the normality of the natural, where I am a creature among many others like me; this is a question against the obviousness of my participation in the genus where participating in the whole the Ego hides in anonymity of mutually substitutable people. This question - Do I have a right to be? - is ethical and asks about the meaning of "Da" in Dasein, and not just "Why is there Dasein and not the opposite - nothing?" (which is the ontological question).

It is impossible to respond to the ethical question about the meaning of human existence, i.e. about the significance of existential time, by referring to natural or artificial purposefulness, that is, in ontological, phenomenological, sociological, epistemological, or other logical terms. Assessment from the point of view of the participation in historical time transforms individuals into heralds of Hegel's World Spirit or cogs in the social mechanism. Within history an illusion is created that "we do not speak the language, but it speaks to us." Questions about my right to be seem like conceptual questions of reflection, which are replied to by means of concepts, only in that they destroy the spontaneity of my naïve struggle to be. But reflection returns the Ego to himself, whereas the ethical question, which the Ego asks himself, is a reply to the request of the Other. The ethical question is not raised by the Ego's desire for self-knowledge, but by the presence of the Other in front of the Same. To this question the single Self replies with each "I do," "I think," and even with the simple "I am." Ego's responsibility and the relation to the Other are created simultaneously; or to be more precise, Ego's responsibility is the most fundamental relation with the Other.

The Self exists in the process of his identification. He rediscovers again and again his identity, passing through everything that happens to Ego within existential time. The heterogeneity of my experience is taken under "I think" and is homogenized in *Jemeinigkeit*. This is the world of the imperialistic and self-centered Ego. The way in which Ego faces the otherness of the world consists in settling down and abiding "here" on the earth and under the skies waiting for gods together with other mortals. "Here" is not an empty container but the place where the Ego is subject, where it manifests its possibilities, where it depends on reality which is different but is comprehended by the Ego, totalized by it, represented as a whole. From this point on, every item is "in-certed" in the world thanks to the here-ness of the Ego. The otherness here

is the reality on which the Ego depends and also thanks to which it exists as a creature supported in its freedom. Every reality is related to it, everything is in its possession - it is comprehended theoretically and mastered practically. And if any theory is never fully completed, this is due not just to the weakness, limitedness, incapability, finitude of the Self, but first of all due to the Other. The Other is the one who does not allow to be captured and closed in a system and does not become a part of the whole of the world. He is beyond. The Absolutely Other escapes any representation, thematization, comprehension, and in this sense is Transcendence, Infinity. This is his way to be an Other.

According to Levinas the Ego and the Other are connected with a link, which is not similar to any of the natural links: the one between a cause and effect, between a system and its elements, between a function and organism. The link between the Self and the Other is the word. It is commitment and not merely coexistence; it is ethical, metaphysical, and not simply ontological.

### **In the beginning was the word ...with the Other**

According to Levinas every true word is a command.<sup>3</sup> Of course, this statement is shocking today. Nowadays, it is believed that the true word is dialogue, and the dialogue is a kind of mutual exchange, a kind of agreement among participants, discussion that achieves a shared understanding about what we are interested in. Not the command, but even mentoring intonation is unacceptable. It is believed that the good intonation implies tolerance to the right of the Other to express his own opinion. It is accepted that not only coercion, but even a simple admonition would be rather an impediment for communication purposes. In a true dialogue, everybody should have equal chance to hold an independent point of view and to be an equal participant in the discussion. This means that everybody has the possibility to contribute to the achievement of mutual concord, common result, or common decision. Conversation in a dialogue is considered to be a reciprocal exchange of information, perspectives,

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<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press: 2000), "Freedom and Command," 15-23

evaluations, etc., which are bet as a kind of stake. Objectivity, which rises up in a dialogue, implies inter-subjectivity, which is at least bilateral (and potentially is multilateral). Every discussion is a dialectic of questions and replies. What is spoken about unifies collocutors and makes their relation symmetrical because they are centered on something Third - the topic of the conversation. The Third is the object of the conversation and, therefore, the common place, which allows finding a common language; that is, overcoming particularity by means of a background of common horizon. A new world is established through the understanding among its participants.

Levinas, of course, would not have rejected this as he was aware that language is a manifestation of logos. But before being logos it is appeal; before being the articulation of items in the world, it is an appeal to the Other. It is true that in the art of inference the most important moment is finding the middle Third - that is, the middle term. But before setting up symmetrical and reciprocal relations between the collocutors, word is an address to the Other: "Word is an exchange of ideas about the world. Together with the hidden thoughts which it carries, vicissitudes of sincerity and the deceptive picture it outlines, language implies the uniqueness of the face without which it could not begin." That is why any language implies a kind of approach to the Other, and this is an asymmetrical and non-reciprocal relation whereby the Other is the one summoned. In the direction from the One to the Other, the Other is privileged. Because of him the conversation is started. Because of him all efforts are undertaken and all chances are taken. He motivates the address and initially defines the intentionality of the ensuing conversation. Relation of the One to the Other determines later any "what," "how," and "why" of the contact. The topical as well as interpretational and motivational relevancies are preceded by the relevance of the Other.

For Levinas, as it was stressed many times before, the Other is transcendence par excellence. It is the privileged and is not on the same level with me, as the usual notion of dialogue considers it. The road to it does not resemble a trajectory linking two points on the same level. Inequality between the Other and me is not, however, one of the type between a master and slave when the two finite beings are hierarchically located in the same finite world within certain socio-political relations. The

approach to the Other cannot be compared to an interaction between two equally active natural or social beings. The difference between the Other and me is similar to the one between Infinity and finitude. The Other is always beyond the scope of my intentional field. In a conversation, it is not the thematized, nor is it an object being a conglomerate of visible qualities. The Other exceeds the idea of the Other in me - at any moment he goes beyond the representation I create about him. Comprehension, I have of him, depends essentially on my measure, on my capabilities, interests, motivation, and so on, which impose outlines on him. But in a conversation, the Other always gives more than my expectations. The Other's face expresses itself: first, because face has meaning by itself; second, because I can always be surprised by his reactions, questions, and replies; third, even before it has said yes or no concerning the topic, both concord and discord depend on it; it is the condition both for truth and non-truth, as for good so for evil, as for justice so for vileness. That is why, according to Levinas, to walk to the Other in a conversation means to meet his expression.

The Other's face is independent of my initiative and my power. It puts under question my freedom to create images and representations, to evaluate, to ascribe meanings to the things and the others. It commands my ability to see, understand, judge. It itself judges me and makes me to look for truth and justice, i.e. to doubt the rights of my spontaneity. But this means that I am instructed and that the Other's face "teaches me in some sense." In a conversation, I am advised, brought up, that is, a direction is shown to me. The true word is one that gives advice. It is not just and only a description of the moon's landscapes with unmovable stones or of deserts with moving sands where there are no creatures to be seen; it is not admiration to nature, which is indifferent to the humans; neither it is foreseeing and calculating the results achieved in the production process or in creating new horizons. It is not even signing contracts for exchange, made possible through a comparison of otherwise unique and thus incomparable individuals. Any word appropriate, it is at "its place" when it carries the sense, original in relation to everything said - orientation towards the Other. The Other's very presence and otherness defines the meaning which precedes any denotation: because of it a speaker resorts to signs.

According to Levinas, transcendence of an external world always is approached intentionally, because we are led by our own goals. Transcendence of the Other, however, is of an entirely different kind: this is not the transcendence of that which is beyond my boundaries, but still something included with me in a common world, which relates to each other; the Other is that which is beyond in relation to my world, in relation to me and my actual and potential universe. If the material world is produced thanks to human activity (theoretical and practical) and being such is an extrapolation of experience over unknown and unconquered territories, the Other is transcendent in relation to any territory with which the Ego is practically and theoretically identified. The Other is both the condition and the last sanction in relation to the world. "Relation to the Other is not created outside the world, but puts under question one's own world." The true experience is the meeting with the Other. In the face of the Other, infinity flashes and speaks to me; it always surpasses its transcendental image in me. Parameters of everything in the world acquire meaning only through the fundament which the Self puts the Other on. This is not a dimension of width, but of depth. Depth of my world coincides with the height on which the Other is elevated.

After God's death, his throne, his high standing place was empty, but merely soon to be occupied by something third - for instance, Reason, History, World, Society, etc., concerning which positions of all "God's children" are equalized. Hierarchical human relations (or the vertical order) are attacked as being relations of unjustified privileges. Philosophers of the early-modern period claimed that people are born equal and free and this is not only the initial condition of human existence, but also the social ideal: equality of the representatives of the human genus. However, Levinas insists, that the primary human relation is not equality, but inequality: I always have one more responsibility than the other; besides for myself, I am responsible for the Other. If I try to flee from it relying on the Third (for instance, on somebody else, on institutions, values, society, and so on), this means that I do not take personal responsibility for the Other. The most common excuse is that the fate of the Other is his business, that it does not concern me, that I must not put my nose there. It is expected of me to be like Cain who asks: "Am I my brother's keeper?" In modern society, it is usually

said that there are institutions and services which are in charge of upholding the rights and responsibilities of others. Such type of discourse as a rule accompanies anonymous relations. But the paradox consists namely in this, as Levinas often stressed, that personal responsibility cannot be avoided, because even when we relate to the Other with indifference and apathy and do not respond to him, this is also a kind of response, a kind of relation to him. Just like in the case of Descartes: when I doubt whether thinking exists, thinking cannot be denied since doubt and denial are also thinking. In the same way, according to Levinas, when I refuse to respond, this is also a kind of response. There is no escape from personal responsibility. Irresponsibility is precisely the attempt to transfer my responsibility to someone else or to a faceless agency (collective, state, circumstances, fate...) and this is leaving the Other alone without my support - "I can do nothing more for you." For these situations, there is an expression *sbogom* in Slavic languages meaning literally "with God," that is, "[may] God be with you," "I leave you in the hands of God," "remain with God," "may God help you," "let be divine will," and in French this is "*a-Dieu*."

In fact, according to Levinas, divine interference in our fate of human beings has to be sought in diametrically opposite direction: no matter how we are trying to turn our back and to ignore links with the Other, we cannot succeed in this endeavor; we cannot suppress and destroy society. Here, we can again make an analogy with Descartes. As it is known, Descartes says that God has implanted in us a spark of Reason and no matter how much we try to step on and extinguish it, that is impossible. The human mind, according to Descartes, contains something divine where the first seeds of thought have been sown, and even when we prevent them from being developed and distort them, nevertheless, they bear fruits, which ripen by themselves. In a similar way, Levinas thinks about a "sociality" whereby human reason is manifested first of all. For Levinas something divine is contained in the relation of the One to the Other, which cannot be destroyed and stamped upon. God has created us in such a way that no matter how we pretend to be deaf and blind to the other, the Other is present, although as the one ignored, unnoticed, and neglected. The Other is present even in its absence. The link with him inevitably bears fruit by itself. As I cannot flee



from myself, no matter how eagerly I try to do so, even in a higher degree, I cannot escape from the relation with the Other. There is no man who is not able to leave the gravity field created between the Other and the Self. Freedom of the Self is already invested by the otherness of the Other. The Other is the one who commands even without suspecting this because his very presence/absence compels me to comply with him. The original consideration of the existence and condition of the Other, although tacitly, is taking a position regarding him. In this sense, Levinas argues that the link with the Other precedes my initiative. Not just because, as Sartre says, the Other is not constituted but is met, but because the very existence of the Ego is already the reply "I am here!" to the imperative presence of the Other and to the heteronomy springing from it. Each "I think," "I do," and even the simple "I am" responds to the appeal of the Other to me. The bidding of the Other is not pronounced but we submit to it even before we have understood it. The direct relation between the One and the Other is saying, which in the moment of its pronouncement freezes in what has already been said, i.e. in the relation intermediated by words. What is said is a placement of the One towards the Other before establishment of a world and a common space. Speaking implies difference before shaping it in equal symmetrical relations or organizing a social game with its own rules (which the collocutors follow and thus become uniform). If the Other is like me, if he thinks and perceives like me, seeing things in the same perspective and giving them the same value like me, why should we talk? Everything would be already common and communicated. The One speaks to the Other because they are different and the One has something to give or pass to the other. While the First speaks the Second is listening. The word is needed, first of all, in order to transmit something to somebody else.

The difference in the level cannot ever be overcome. The depth of the conversation is not seen by the Third. It can be understood by the Third only indirectly. The true conversation is the meeting with the collocutor. The essence of the conversation is a simultaneous affirmation of my self and respect or, it can be said, admiration of the otherness of the Other. Interlocutors are not placed on a common ground; the relation between them is like the one between a settled person and the newcomer. A stranger's approaching a local person never has the same meaning as the reply, which

the local gives to one knocking on his door. The essential in this relation is the meeting, hospitality, attention to the words, expectation of the message of the newcomer. The true conversation implies addressing the face bringing the message. On account of this, facts and events are elevated in significance and fulfilled with meaning. The original meaning springs from the face of the interlocutor. The Other is not just the one whom I understand, grasp in my imagination and thinking, the one whose messages I read through his gestures and clothes, words and silence. This is only the Third one who immediately appears behind the Second. To approach the Other in a conversation means to meet the expression of his face that breaks any yielding form, any frozen smile or sorrow, any mask, any image. The Other's expression is actualization of his presence in front of me. When somebody expresses himself, inevitably attaching meanings to things, he speaks. Discourse is forwarding meanings of the One to the Other. But as Levinas emphasized, the process of forwarding is forwarded. Only thanks to the transmitter, things and ideas can be forwarded. Presence of the forwarder overcomes the anarchy of facts, events, and information by introducing the direction of forwarding and thus imposes order and outlines a common world which is shared and established by what has been said.

What is essential in the word, following Levinas' interpretation, is requesting, summoning, and awakening responsibility. The foreigner asks me a question which I can choose to reply to or not; but only his presence as stranger puts under doubt my right to be the settled one, local, usurper of this land. The Other questions my internal spontaneous freedom to identify myself with this world, with the established order; he commands and seeks for a reply, makes it to justify itself, judges it, leads it to the truth about itself. Truth, however, is not achieved from the time distance as a historical justice (on what probably Hegel would insist); true justice consists in seeing my master, forwarder and advisor whose command, advice, covenant are understood by being fulfilled before any cognition. Namely this first understanding-submission is more ancient than conscience or subject-object relation. And the more just the Self, the more guilty is he. His obligations increase at the same degree in which they are fulfilled. In the historical time whereupon the individual is the citizen of a state, member of a society,

participant in a community, rights and obligations are balanced as a result of a struggle for mutual recognition among various groups and individuals. Within the immediate social link, however, that is, in the relation face to face, the more Ego gives the more it gets indebted. Unlike human rights in general, which are protected by the Charter as a limit for the group or individual egoism, in ethics, the most important is not my right, but the right of the Other. To be Self, says Levinas, means to see, beyond the universal laws and rights, the insult offered by the verdict of history, which does not take into consideration the subjectivity of the Other. The invisible, historical time is namely neglecting the first person and his right to defense, which nobody else can carry out in his place. To be Self, and not just an embodiment of universal laws or dialectical maneuvers of the World Reason, means to be responsible not only for my own deeds, as it is according to the judgment of history, but to reply to the Other - to worry about the right of the Other more than about my own rights; to think about the responsibility I take in advance even before my deed is completed. This means to be able to foresee my own possible moral fall and the arbitrariness of my freedom, which is not preceded by responsibility. This means to worry about the Other, more than I am afraid of death, to take risk in order not to leave the Other alone and without a reply, to spend my time for the time of the Other. In the moment when the Self assumes that he has fulfilled his duty towards the Other and seizes to feel summoned to be in vigil for him, then, indifference is taking place of non-indifference. From that moment on, the intrigue with the otherness of the Other, which is love to the fellow men - love with no union, with no voluptuousness, with no flirt and self-interest, degenerates into a plot, a calculation of interests, a struggle for recognition and more power, on into war or peace, which is only a temporary cease fire until the next battle.

However, the question stands not about this compromised peace, achieved at the battlefield as a result of temporary agreements and hostilities, but about Messianic peace, which is a saving and supra-historical one.

## Eschatological time

Messianic peace does not come to reign after the course of history is already over. Just the opposite: in each “now” of history the Other summons the Ego and gives him the floor. The difference between individual existence in history with no right to be authentically myself and my existence for the Other in a face-to-face relation distinguishes historical from eschatological time. Eschatology is the end of history when not history judges, but history itself is judged. This happens not at a point outside history, but amidst history. Eschatological time is the overcoming of the direction of one’s existential time, which leads to death and towards the time of the Other. This is also overcoming the facelessness threatening the course of history. This transition, this overcoming as being for the Other means spending my time in order to create and maintain the time of the one who is going to be after me, even when I will not exist. Eschatological time is created as surpassing the instinct of the self-preservation of a mortal being in deaconship, in the vigil for the Other, in service and mass for him as well as for the others.

In eschatology, the Ego has no hope for itself. Moses leads his people to the Promised Land, but he himself does not get into it. Transformation of the Ego into a subject bearing the responsibility for everything that happens or does not happen in world history puts him on the place of the Messiah. In each moment of time, he judges history not only for his own being-to-death, where his own existence is a problem, but also for the being-to-death-of-the-Other. Thus, eschatological time is diachronical not synchronical; it is unlike biographical or historical time. Eschatological time is the very relationship to the Other. However, this relation is not symmetrical, because the Self always is loaded with one more responsibility. He is always responsible not only for himself but for the Other too, even for the very responsibility of the Other, while the responsibility of the Other to me, as Levinas puts it, is his own business. Eschatological time is diachronic because my existential time is meaningful not only for me but also for the Other’s existential time (as well as for the existential time of the Third).

Time itself must not be mixed up with what is not time, but is only temporal, as for instance historical time is regarded in the case of the

becoming of being. Historical becoming is represented through the change and preservation of creatures, which unite and separate, live and die like atoms in a vacuum. After them, no more than a short-term trace remains, which disappears quickly, melted in the vector of history. According to Levinas, however, there is a genuine and ineffaceable trace. It appears in the obligation of the One “to be his brother’s keeper” here and now when that “who obliges” has been withdrawn from the world. His absence flashes in the epiphany of the face. The Transcendence, which has already passed, shines in the eyes, in the face of the Other. However, this light, superiority, height, divinity are not deduced out of being which is “here and now”, neither out of disclosure, nor out of hiding. Trace is the inclusion of the immensity of the Other into time, a point when the world is directed to a past and a time, which is not the time of the world “here and now”, but is an irrevocable transcendence. “A trace is a presence of that which properly speaking has never been there, of what is always past.”<sup>4</sup> God who has passed, says Levinas, is not the model whose image would be the face: “to be in image of God does not mean to be an icon of God, but to find oneself in his trace.”<sup>5</sup> To follow this trace does not mean to go to God, but to go to the others. “God does not play the role of an intermediary. The Other is not divine incarnation, but exactly through the face of the Other, the height, where God is disclosed, is manifested.”<sup>6</sup> The road to God passes through responsibility for others. Perhaps, says Levinas, this transition is eternity. I seriously believe, declares he, this utopia will influence history. Existential time cannot be just an interval in historical time, neither is it just surviving as a result of making one’s own being problematic and choosing oneself with triumphant resolution in order to reduce the time of world history to the time of existence; messianic, eschatological time is gathering the moments of the sacred in the profane, i.e. in existential and historical time. Messianic time interrupts the onward march of history and of existence making each time possible anew. It also defines their direction. Eschatological time is spent not for my salvation from death, but for saving the otherness of the

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<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Levinas. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 105

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 107

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Levinas. *Totalite et infini*, 77

Other. “There, where will moves to life against someone or for someone, death does not touch it.”<sup>7</sup>

With death, biological movements loose any dependence on denotation, on expression. Death is destruction; it is in-expressiveness, lack of reply like non-responsibility. Death is the incurable emptiness. And the opposite is true: if one lives, if he is himself, that means that he is not indifferent to others: he expresses himself, he replies to them, he is responsible, he carries guilt for them, he is a face and not a mask. He does not allow senselessness to enter human intimacy or slavery to be perpetuated or the void to ascend the throne.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 26

# Philosophy and Literature: A Whiteheadian Perspective

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## Whitehead on literature and philosophy

Whitehead regards literature (and poetry in particular) as a source of philosophy. In this paper I want to explore that belief. In turning to literature as a context of philosophical reflection, I am also siding with him that philosophy can be enriched when it enters into dialogue with literature.

Whitehead manifests a closeness, even if rather implicit, not only with the rich European literary-philosophical tradition but also with certain concerns of contemporary European philosophy. There is an interesting passage which provides some insight into Whitehead's understanding of the relationship between poetry and philosophy. In *Modes of Thought*, he writes: "Philosophy is akin to poetry. Philosophy is the endeavour to find a conventional phraseology for the vivid suggestiveness of the poet. It is the endeavour to reduce Milton's *Lycidas* to prose, and thereby to produce a verbal symbolism manageable for use in other connections of thought."<sup>2</sup> And in another work, *Adventures of Ideas*, he acknowledges that what philosophy does is to build on an already firm foundation, explaining that philosophy expresses "flashes of insight beyond meaning already stabilised in etymology and grammar."<sup>3</sup>

Despite Plato's famous wish that poets be banished from the Republic and the ancient quarrel between poets and philosophers, there has always

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<sup>2</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1938), 49-50. On this point, cf. Robert E. Doud, "A Whiteheadian Interpretation of Baudelaire's Poetry," *Process Studies*, XXXI, 2 (Fall-Winter, 2002), 16-31.

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 291.

been a close, if at times tense, relationship between the art of poetry and the act of philosophising. In comparison to the Asian philosophical heritage, the Western philosophical tradition, at least in its dominant form, may not be as keen to regard literature in general and poetry in particular as rich sources of philosophical insight.<sup>4</sup> In fact, many would maintain a certain distinction, with clearly described features, between what is literary and what is philosophical. There is in certain quarters of European philosophy, which insists on criticism, depth and comprehensiveness, a rather negative attitude towards poetry. Heidegger in his essay “What are poets for?” bemoans the fact that philosophers consider a dialogue with poetry as “a helpless aberration into fantasy”.<sup>5</sup> This rather negative attitude can be traced back to Plato, the forerunner of European philosophy. As Whitehead puts it, the emergence of the critical discontent with the poets is exemplified by Plato.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, there has also been an acknowledgement by some European philosophers that Plato’s understanding of poetry *vis-à-vis* philosophical thinking was too restricted. Much poetry contains a great deal of philosophical insight and some philosophical writing, in so far as these are the works of well-respected philosophers, can be found in genres which are more literary (e.g., many in the existentialist movement). Romanticism, which upholds spontaneity, emotion, and individuality, arose in reaction to the perceived inadequacy of the kind of theoretical reason upheld by the Hegelian system. The Romantics felt that poetry provides the most adequate path to truth. In the essay cited above, Heidegger maintained that the course of the history of Being will lead thinking into a dialogue with poetry. Gadamer’s recent book, *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue*, promotes that exchange of views between literary writers and

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<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that ancient Indian heritage is a particularly good illustration.

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger does warn that scholars of literary history consider the dialogue to be “an unscientific violation of what such scholarship takes to be the facts”. Cf. his *Poetry, Language and Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1971), 96. For a helpful anthology on this topic, see Hazard Adams (ed.), *Critical Theory Since Plato* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 12.



philosophers.<sup>7</sup>

The relationship between literature (particularly poetry) and philosophy appears to be an issue in contemporary European philosophical debates, especially in the context of philosophical hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur's conviction that there is always a Being-demanding-to-be-said (*un être-à-dire*) which precedes our actual saying urges him on to the poetic uses of language. Towards the end of *Being and Time* Heidegger had stated that the propositional form in which he had been writing was not really adequate to capture his thought. (It is an observation reminiscent of Kierkegaard who referred to a mode of communication in which the writer uses all the artistic means at his disposal to awaken the reader to what can only be indicated, not stated.) The later Heidegger becomes more specific. Pre-occupied with language as the "house of Being," he pointed to the inextricable connection between our conception of the world and our language: language alone brings beings as beings into the open for the first time. Maintaining that poetic language is the purest form of speech, he considers that in poetic language, language speaks itself (*Die Sprache spricht*) and unfolds its true essence. The essence of poetry is "the founding of truth" (as Heidegger understood it). He had confidence in the ability of poetic language to evoke the nature of things whereas he had grave reservations about the form of writing, which he himself adopted. In fact, he regarded the poet, whose "projective saying" enables new aspects of Being to reveal themselves, as the true philosopher.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hans Gadamer, *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue: Essays in German Literary Theory*, trans. Robert H. Paslick (New York: SUNY, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> See, among his other writings, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper & Row, 1971) and *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (Harper & Row, 1971). Heidegger maintains that the purity of poetic language is such that it is not important to know anything about the poet or the origins of the poetic work. Poetic language which reveals the essence of being, and not ordinary language, is the truly original manifestation of human language. Reference to Heidegger here is not meant to be an agreement with his methodology as will be evident in what follows in the main text. While Heidegger's dissatisfaction with philosophical discourse led him to poetic language, what I am claiming is that poetry and other literary forms are a valuable *source* for philosophical thinking.

### Literature and philosophy: a Whiteheadian nexus

In this section, I should like to suggest how the dialogue between literature and philosophy can be grounded in Whitehead's thought.

Whitehead regarded the word experience as "one of the most deceitful in philosophy."<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, he maintained that what philosophy describes or discloses through the system of general ideas is "our experience." This means that for him the primary datum for philosophical analysis is no other than subjective experiencing. This "subjectivist bias" is for Whitehead an ontological principle (referred to as "the reformed subjectivist principle"). As he put it, "apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness."<sup>10</sup> Insofar as it is an ontological principle, experiencing is not, as is commonly understood, limited to human experiencing. Whitehead rejected any sharp distinction between humans and other beings, living and non-living. To make such a sharp distinction, according to him, is too vague and hazardous.<sup>11</sup> He therefore universalises experience, extending it to all realms of reality.

What makes human experience distinctive is that it includes thinking. But thinking itself does not constitute the generic nature of human existence since humans live even when asleep and are unconscious. Whitehead regards thinking as derived from sensation but not in the sense of the sensationalist theory of the empiricists, who maintain that "perception is the conscious entertainment of definite and clear-cut sensa."<sup>12</sup> According to Whitehead, experience cannot be identified with clear, distinct, and conscious entertainment of sensation, explaining that the unborn child, the baby in its cradle, or one in the state of sleep, etc. have a vast background of feeling which is neither conscious nor definite. "Clear, conscious discrimination is an

<sup>9</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Symbolism: its Meaning and Effect* (Cambridge University Press, 1928), 19.

<sup>10</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (The Free Press, 1978), 167.

<sup>11</sup> A.N. Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 1926), p. 79; see also *The Function of Reason* (Oxford University Press, 1929), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 228.

accident of human existence. It makes us human. But it does not make us exist. It is of the essence of our humanity. But it is an accident of our existence.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the structure of human experience discloses the structure of reality itself. As he said, “We construct the world in terms of the types of activities disclosed in our intimate experience.”<sup>14</sup> One can find, therefore, in descriptions of the human experience what Whitehead refers to as factors which also enter into the descriptions of less specialised natural occurrence.<sup>15</sup>

Whitehead describes every occasion of experience, human or otherwise, as dipolar; that is to say, it has an aspect of subjectivity and another aspect of objectivity, an aspect of process and another aspect of permanence.<sup>16</sup> “It is mental experience integrated with physical experience. Mental experience is the converse of bodily experience.”<sup>17</sup> His reformed subjectivist principle is thus a claim that the final fact is a subject experiencing objects which in turn are determined subjects. Subject and object are thus regarded as interlinked in the same final fact. This claim amounts to a rejection of the extreme realist position of the sensationalist principle of the empiricist tradition which holds that “the primary activity in

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<sup>13</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 116. In *Function of Reason*, p. 62, Whitehead explains, “The equating of experience with clarity of knowledge is against the evidence. In our own lives, and at any one moment, there is a focus of attention, a few items in clarity of awareness, but interconnected vaguely and yet insistently with other items in dim apprehension, and this dimness shading off imperceptibly into indiscriminate feeling. Further, the clarity cannot be segregated from the vagueness. The togetherness of the things that are clear refuses to yield its secret to clear analytic intuition. The whole forms a system, but when we set out to describe the system, direct intuitions play us false. Our conscious awareness is fluctuating, flitting, and not under control. It lacks penetration. The penetration of intuition follows upon the expectation of thought. This is the secret of attention.”

<sup>14</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 115.

<sup>15</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 237.

<sup>16</sup> Dipolarity is a metaphysical principle in both Whitehead’s and Hartshorne’s metaphysical systems.

<sup>17</sup> Whitehead, *Function of Reason*, 25-26.

the act of experience is the bare subjective entertainment of the datum, devoid of any subjective form of reception.”<sup>18</sup> As Whitehead explains it, experience is not purely a private qualification of the mind. He adds that “if experience be not based upon an objective content, there can be no escape from a solipsist subjectivism.”<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, he affirms that “the world within experience is identical with the world beyond experience”<sup>20</sup> and that what Descartes discovered on the side of subjectivism “requires balancing by an ‘objectivist’ principle as to the datum for experience.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 157.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>20</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 293. On page 268 and the following pages, Whitehead discusses the dichotomy within the objective content of an occasion of experience in terms of “appearance and reality.”

<sup>21</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 160. The following passage is a particularly helpful summation by Whitehead: “An occasion of experience is an activity, analysable into modes of functioning which jointly constitute its process of becoming. Each mode is analysable into the total experience as active subject, and into the thing or object with which the special activity is concerned. This thing is a datum, that is to say, is describable without reference to its entertainment in that occasion. An object is anything performing this function of a datum provoking some special activity of the occasion in question. Thus subject and object are relative terms. An occasion is a subject in respect to its special activity concerning an object; and anything is an object in respect to its provocation of some special activity within a subject. Such a mode of activity is termed a “prehension”. Thus prehension involves three factors. There is the occasion of experience within which the prehension is a detail of activity; there is the datum whose relevance provokes the origination of this prehension; this datum is the prehended object; there is the subjective form, which is the affective tone determining the effectiveness of that prehension in that occasion of experience. How the experience constitutes itself depends on its complex of subjective forms” (p. 226).

## Modes of experience

Turning now to human experience itself, Whitehead describes two modes of experience, independent but each contributing its share of components into one concrete moment of human experience.<sup>22</sup> He calls the clear, conscious, sensory mode “perception in the mode of presentational immediacy.” But this mode of experience is based upon and derived from a more elemental form of experience, which is vague and unconscious and which he calls “perception in the mode of causal efficacy.”<sup>23</sup> The mode of causal efficacy, which Whitehead describes as heavy and primitive, dominates primitive living organisms.<sup>24</sup> He explains that in human experience, this elemental form of perception is exhibited by the “withness of the body:” “it is this withness that makes the body the starting point for our knowledge of the circumambient world.”<sup>25</sup> Senses are specialisations of the withness of the body: “we see with our eyes, we do not see our eyes” while our body is “that portion of nature with which each moment of human experience intimately cooperates.”<sup>26</sup> For this reason Whitehead maintains that it is difficult to determine accurately the definite boundary of one’s body and that it is very vaguely distinguishable from external nature.<sup>27</sup> He regards the body as united with the environment as well as with the soul.<sup>28</sup> Causation then, as far as Whitehead is concerned, is not an a priori category within the mind alone, as in Kant, but an element in experience.<sup>29</sup> As he put it, “The notion of causation arose because mankind lives amid experiences in the mode of causal efficacy.”<sup>30</sup> Thus the elemental form of perception is causation, it being an element of the very structure of reality.

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<sup>22</sup> In *Symbolism*, 20, Whitehead actually mentions three modes, the third being “the mode of conceptual analysis.”

<sup>23</sup> Whitehead, *Function of Reason*, 78-79.

<sup>24</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 115

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>29</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 166-167.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 175. The term that Whitehead uses to describe this is “prehension”. Cf. *Process and Reality*, p. 19.

Whitehead defined the mode of presentational immediacy, the other mode of experiencing, as “our immediate perception of the contemporary external world, appearing as an element constitutive of our own experience.”<sup>31</sup> It expresses how contemporary events are relevant to each other while preserving a mutual independence.<sup>32</sup> In this mode contemporary things are objectively in our experience. No actual thing is objectified as such but only an abstraction. Among these abstract entities are those called sense-data; for example, colours, sounds, tastes, touches, and bodily feelings.<sup>33</sup> Compared to the mode of causal efficacy, presentational immediacy leads to knowledge that is vivid, precise, and barren. It is also to a large extent controllable at will; that is to say, that one moment of experience, through various modifications, can predetermine to a considerable extent the other characteristics of the presentational immediacy in succeeding moments of experience.<sup>34</sup>

The fusing of these two modes into one perception is called by Whitehead “symbolic reference.” He explains that in symbolic reference “the various

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<sup>31</sup> By “presentational immediacy” Whitehead explains that he means what is usually termed “sense perception” but not as having exactly the same connotations as that term. (Cf. *Symbolism*, 25.) He maintains that “presentational immediacy is only of importance in high-grade organisms and is a physical fact which may, or may not, enter into consciousness. Such entry will depend on attention and on the activity of conceptual functioning, whereby physical experience and conceptual imagination are fused into knowledge,” (p. 19) and that “the reason why low-grade purely physical organisms cannot make mistakes is not primarily their absence of thought, but their absence of presentational immediacy.” (p. 24). Also for most events, he presumes that their intrinsic experience of presentational immediacy is so embryonic as to be negligible. “This perceptive mode is important only for a small minority of elaborate organisms.” (p. 29).

<sup>32</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 19. He cites the main facts about presentational immediacy to be: “(i) that the sense-data involved depend on the percipient organisms and its spatial relations to the perceived organisms, (ii) that the contemporary world is exhibited as extended and as a plenum of organisms, (iii) that presentational immediacy is an important factor in the experience of only a few high-grade organisms, and that for the others it is embryonic or entirely negligible,” (p. 26).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

actualities disclosed respectively by the two modes are either identified, or are at least correlated together as interrelated elements in our environment,” the result being “what the actual world is for us, as that datum in our experience productive of feelings, emotions, actions, and finally as the topic for conscious recognition when our mentality intervenes with its conceptual analysis.”<sup>35</sup> This linking of the two modes, which leads to human symbolism, shows that there are common structural elements since they are perceptions of the same world. However, there are gaps, which means that their fusion is indeterminate. Whitehead adds that “intellectual criticism founded on subsequent experience can enlarge and purify the primitive naïve symbolic transference.”<sup>36</sup> He contrasts symbolic reference with direct recognition insofar as the latter is “conscious recognition of a percept in a pure mode, devoid of symbolic reference.”<sup>37</sup> As a matter of fact, however, there is no complete ideal purity of either perceptive experience without any symbolic reference.<sup>38</sup> Error may arise in symbolic reference inasmuch as direct recognition may disagree in its report of the actual world. In symbolic reference mental analysis is rather at a minimum. On the other hand, it compensates for this in its imaginative freedom.

Symbolic reference precedes conceptual analysis, but the two promote each other. One may be inclined to associate symbolic reference with mental activity, but Whitehead holds that it is a matter of pure convention as to which of our experiential activities we term “mental” and which “physical” since, as we have already noted, for Whitehead there is no proper line to be drawn between the physical and the mental constitution of experience. Moreover, much of our perception is subtly enhanced by a concurrent conceptual analysis. There is no conscious knowledge without the intervention of mentality in the form of conceptual analysis.<sup>39</sup> Symbolic reference is a datum for thought in its analysis of experience. Our conceptual scheme of the universe should generally and logically be coherent with it and should correspond to the ultimate facts of the pure perceptive modes. But when this does not happen, we then should revise our conceptual scheme to retain the general trust in the symbolic

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

reference, while accepting as mistaken definite details of that reference.<sup>40</sup>

Whitehead also defines symbolic reference as “the organic functioning whereby there is transition from the symbol to the meaning,” when some components of experience, i.e. symbols, elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience, i.e. meaning. It is “the active synthetic element contributed by the nature of the percipient.”<sup>41</sup> Symbolic reference is, as Whitehead defines it in another context, “the interpretative element in human experience.”<sup>42</sup> In this sense, symbolic reference is related to language. In language we have a fundamental type of symbolism: “The word is a symbol, and its meaning is constituted by the ideas, images and emotions, which it raises in the mind of the hearers.”<sup>43</sup> But in addition to the bare meaning, words and phrases carry with them an inclusive suggestiveness and an emotional efficacy associated with the way they had been used in history.<sup>44</sup> Whitehead explains this point: “A word has a symbolic association with its own history, its other meanings and with its general status in current literature. Thus a word gathers emotional signification from its emotional history in the past; and this is transferred symbolically to its meaning in present use.”<sup>45</sup> He maintains that the whole basis of the art of literature is “that emotions and feelings directly excited by the words should fitly intensify our emotions and feelings arising from contemplation of the meaning.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 73.

<sup>43</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 99. In *Adventures of Ideas*, 5. Whitehead actually points out that there is no “mere knowledge” since knowledge is always accompanied by emotion and purpose.

<sup>46</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 98-99. There is a particular vagueness in symbolism. Compared to direct experience which is infallible in that what one has experienced has been experienced, symbolism is very fallible “in the sense that it may induce actions, feelings, emotions, and beliefs about things which are mere notions without that exemplification in the world which symbolism leads us to presuppose.”



## The language of literature and philosophy

Given the above consideration by Whitehead on experience and our expression of that experience, what Whitehead has to say on literature is particularly relevant: "It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression. Accordingly it is to literature that we must look, particularly in its more concrete forms, namely in poetry and in drama, if we hope to discover the inward thoughts of a generation."<sup>47</sup> We have already noted his conviction that the ultimate appeal is to experience, and now he adds his reason why he puts much stress on the evidence of poetry: "My point is, that in our sense-experience we know away from and beyond our own personality, whereas the subjectivist holds that in such experience we merely know about our own personality."<sup>48</sup> Whitehead points out that one function of great literature is to evoke a vivid feeling of what lies beyond words.<sup>49</sup> Literature manages to combine what Whitehead considers to be a curious mixture of "tacitly presupposing analysis, and conversely of returning to emphasise explicitly the fundamental emotional importance of our naïve general intuitions."<sup>50</sup>

It is interesting to compare Whitehead's observations with Goethe's comments on poetry. Goethe holds that it is reality that provides, as it were "the points to be expressed". According to him, reality is the kernel. It also supplies the motive.<sup>51</sup> And Goethe's advice to the poet is: "Only have the courage to give yourself up to your impressions, allow yourself to be delighted, moved, elevated; nay, instructed and inspired for something great: but do not imagine all is vanity, if it is not abstract thought and idea."<sup>52</sup> As he reflects on his own role as poet, Goethe has this to say:

It was in short not in my line, as a poet, to strive to embody anything abstract. I received in my mind impressions, and those of a sensuous, animated, charming, varied, hundred-fold kind - just a lively imagination presented them; and I had, as a poet, nothing more to do than to round off

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<sup>47</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 106.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>49</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>51</sup> This text is included in Adams' anthology, 514.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

and elaborate artistically such views and impressions, and by means of a lively representation so to bring them forward that others might receive the same impression in hearing or reading my representation of them.<sup>53</sup>

Although in a different context, the novelist-philosopher Iris Murdoch makes a similar observation regarding literary modes of expressing our concrete experiences. She points out that literary modes are an everyday occurrence: they are naturally close to ordinary but reflective life. She remarks that we are beings who constantly use words, employing language to make interesting what is originally dull or incoherent. Thus, we are immersed in a literary atmosphere, where we live and breathe literature. We all are, as she describes us, “literary artists”. Literature or art of any sort emerges because of “the desire to defeat the formlessness of the world and cheer oneself up by constructing forms out of what might otherwise seem a mass of senseless rubble.”<sup>54</sup>

For Whitehead too, literature is a way of capturing the concreteness of experience. In addition, the poetic rendering of our concrete experience, according to him, reminds us that “the element of value, of being valuable, of having value, of being an end in itself, of being something which is for its own sake, must not be omitted in any account of an event as the most concrete actual something.”<sup>55</sup> By “value” he understands the intrinsic reality of an event. It is an element that permeates the poetic view of nature thoroughly. He illustrates this

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

<sup>54</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 6. Murdoch maintains that despite the fact that philosophy and literature are so different, they are both truth-seeking and truth-revealing activities. They are cognitive activities, explanations. She adds that “how far re-shaping involves offence against truth is a problem any artist must face” (p.10). For Whitehead, philosophic truth is to be sought in the presuppositions of language rather than in its expressed statements. He maintains that this is why philosophy is akin to poetry in that both of them seek to express that ultimate good sense which we term civilisation. “In each case there is reference to form beyond the direct meaning of words. Poetry allies itself to metre, philosophy to mathematical pattern.” *Modes of Thought*, viii. See also, Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>55</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 131.

point by referring to the nature-poetry of the romantic poets, which he regards as a protest not only on behalf of the organic view of nature, but also against the exclusion of value in the description of reality. He put it rather succinctly thus, "The romantic reaction was a protest on behalf of value."<sup>56</sup>

Whitehead furthermore notes the significance of literature in its description of nature. Citing the works of Wordsworth, he compares the poet's view of nature with the strained and paradoxical view which modern science offers us: "Wordsworth, to the height of genius, expresses the concrete facts of our apprehension, facts which are distorted on the scientific analysis. Is it not possible that the standardised concepts of science are only valid within narrow limitations, perhaps too narrow for science itself?"<sup>57</sup> Whitehead bemoans the over-emphasis on the intellectual, an attitude that he considers prevalent in the learned world. Such an attitude, he claims, "sterilises imaginative thought, and thereby blocks progress."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the Irish poet W.B. Yeats remarked in a rather forceful fashion that: "By reason and logic we die hourly, by imagination we live."<sup>59</sup> Whitehead reminds us that all productive thought has resulted from and developed because of the poetic insight of artists, or by the imaginative elaboration of schemes of thought capable of utilisation as logical premises<sup>60</sup> while philosophical thought has created for itself difficulties by dealing exclusively in very abstract notions.<sup>61</sup> In this connection, what Whitehead has to say about the advance of ideas is particularly significant:

Now, so far as concerns beliefs of a general character, it is much easier for them to destroy emotion than to generate it. In any survey of the adventure of ideas nothing is more surprising than the ineffectiveness of novel general ideas to acquire for themselves an appropriate emotional pattern of any intensity. Profound flashes of insight remain ineffective for centuries, not because they are unknown,

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>58</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 59.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in J.M. Cocking, *Imagination: a Study in the History of Ideas* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), viii.

<sup>60</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

but by reason of dominant interests which inhibit reaction to that type of generality.<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, Whitehead points out that “the language of literature breaks down precisely at the task of expressing in explicit form the larger generalities - the very generalities which metaphysics seeks to express.”<sup>63</sup> One then needs to go further than literary language to philosophical language, which uses reason. Whitehead regarded reason as a factor in experience, one that directs and criticises the urge towards the attainment of an end which has been realised in imagination but not in fact.<sup>64</sup> He added that “the essence of Reason in its lowliest forms is its judgments upon flashes of novelty, of novelty in immediate realisation and of novelty which is relevant to appetite but not yet to action.”<sup>65</sup>

Elaborating on this point:

In its lowliest form, Reason provides the emphasis on the conceptual clutch after some refreshing novelty. It is then Reason devoid of constructive range of abstract thought. It operates merely as the simple direct judgment lifting a conceptual flash into an effective appetite, and an effective appetite into a realised fact.<sup>66</sup>

Whitehead assigns to reason, and thus to philosophy, the task of understanding and purging the symbols on which humanity depends.<sup>67</sup>

As we have already noted in our discussion of the modes of perception, Whitehead maintains that consciousness itself does not initiate the process of knowledge. Rather, we find ourselves already engaged in it, “immersed in satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and actively modifying, either by intensification, or by attenuation, or by the introduction of novel purposes” but that “after instinct and intellectual ferment have done their work, there is a decision which determines the mode of coalescence of instinct with intelligence.”<sup>68</sup> Here reason acts as “a modifying agency on the

<sup>62</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 220.

<sup>63</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Whitehead, *Function of Reason*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 8.

<sup>68</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 58.

intellectual ferment so as to produce a self-determined issue from the given conditions.”<sup>69</sup> Reason has a tremendous effect in selecting, emphasising, and disintegrating data.<sup>70</sup> In this sense one can say, according to Whitehead, that thought is mainly concerned with the justification or the modification of a pre-existing situation.<sup>71</sup> While all knowledge is conscious discrimination of objects experienced, this conscious discrimination - to return to the point already discussed earlier - is “nothing more than an additional factor in the subjective form of the interplay of subject with object ... All knowledge is derived from, and verified by, direct intuitive observation.”<sup>72</sup>

Whitehead also insisted that it is the business of rational thought to describe the more concrete fact from which abstract thought has been derived.<sup>73</sup> Literature, which conveys meanings through rich and concrete images, powerful metaphors and engaging analogies, is a fertile field for philosophical reflections, which with the aid of reason make such literary language more explicit. Philosophy for Whitehead is intended to regain an undivided world, to think together all aspects of reality.<sup>74</sup> Its aim is to disclose “a complete fact” in all its scientific, aesthetic, moral, religious, etc. aspects. His well-known definition of speculative philosophy is: “the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”<sup>75</sup> Whitehead states that the rationalists failed to disclose a complete fact because of their chief error of overstatement.<sup>76</sup> They overstated abstraction and landed in a dogmatic fallacy. Understanding as a function of philosophy, “to harmonise, refashion, and justify divergent intuitions as to the nature of things”, Whitehead then argues that philosophy must “insist on the scrutiny of the ultimate ideas, and on the retention of the whole of the

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>74</sup> On this point, see André Cloot’s essay, “Thinking Things Together: the Concept of Metaphysics,” in Cloots and Sia (eds.), *Framing a Vision of the World*, 67-84.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 285; also, Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 11.

evidence in shaping our cosmological scheme. Its business is to render explicit, and - so far as may be - efficient, a process which otherwise is unconsciously performed without rational tests.”<sup>77</sup> Philosophy makes the content of the human mind manageable by adding meaning to fragmentary details, by disclosing disjunctions and conjunctions, consistencies and inconsistencies.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, Whitehead regards philosophical reflections as ongoing. Philosophy is an “endeavour”, an “essay” - an adventurous attempt or search. As Whitehead so often puts it, “Philosophy is the search for premises. It is not deduction.”<sup>79</sup> It is not surprising then that he describes philosophy as “descriptive generalization”<sup>80</sup> inasmuch as it should describe, rather than explain, reality. He is critical of traditional philosophy which explained things and whose preoccupation was on the principles which constitute the concrete things, thereby ignoring the very concreteness of reality.<sup>81</sup> Whitehead also uses the term “imaginative generalization” to refer to philosophy<sup>82</sup> highlighting the point that by an imaginative leap the philosopher attempts to capture those aspects of reality which logical technicalities cannot reach.<sup>83</sup>

The following passage sums up Whitehead’s conception of the philosophical task in the context of what has been said so far:

Philosophy is the critic of abstractions. Its function is the double one, first of harmonising them by assigning to them their right relative status as abstractions, and secondly of completing them by direct comparison with more concrete intuitions of the universe, and thereby promoting the formation of more complete schemes of thought. It is in respect to this comparison that the testimony of great poets is of such importance. Their survival is evidence that they express deep intuitions of mankind penetrating into what is universal in concrete fact. Philosophy is not one among the sciences with its own little scheme of abstractions which it works away at perfecting and improving. It is the survey of sciences, with the special objects of their harmony, and of their completion. It brings to this task not

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<sup>77</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, ix.

<sup>78</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 67.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>80</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 15-16.

<sup>81</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 143.

<sup>82</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

only the evidence of the separate sciences, but also its own appeal to concrete experience. It confronts the sciences with concrete fact.<sup>84</sup>

In our philosophical discussion about our experience of reality, Whitehead reminds us of a three-fold distinction of what we need to keep in mind: "(i) our direct intuitions which we enjoy prior to all verbalisation; (ii) our literary modes of verbal expression of such intuitions, together with the dialectic deductions from such verbal formulae; and (iii) the set of purely deductive sciences, which have been developed so that the network of possible relations with which they deal are familiar in civilised consciousness."<sup>85</sup> He warns us that the chief danger in philosophy is the dialectic deductions from inadequate formulae which exclude direct intuitions, such as those found in literature.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 122.

<sup>85</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 177.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-78. Whitehead refers to what he calls "third chapter of evidence" delivered by language, which concerns "meanings beyond individual words and beyond grammatical forms, meanings miraculously revealed in great literature," 291.





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# ENIGMAS OF BEING AND OF HUMAN BEINGS

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## Heidegger's Understanding of Man, Being, and World<sup>1</sup>

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The question of what being human is concerns the traditional history of philosophy insofar as philosophy has been traditionally the search for being. Therefore, to uncover the meaning of human being with respect to the concept of Being and time in the history of being, we refer to Heidegger's understanding of being since we think that Heidegger is the main point for the destruction of the history of ontology and the center of our contemporary understanding of the meaning of being human.

In the traditional sense, human being is understood as a *rational animal* and *cogito*. In this presentation, I will discuss the idea of *cogito* because it occupies a dominant place in the understanding of modern philosophy. Descartes' understanding of human being is based on his theory of substance and its epistemological foundation. Descartes accepts that there

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<sup>1</sup> Human Being has been said in many ways. Our task is to uncover the manifold meaning of human being. For this reason, we call this investigation of meaning of human being as a reinterpretation of the meaning of human being in its traditional, existential, ontological and phenomenological context. In this reinterpretation of the meaning of human being, our main discussion will consider man's being in terms of the concept of Dasein, Being, and world.

are two kinds of substances - infinite and finite. The infinite substance is God. The finite substance can be divided further into two substances: *res cogito* (mind or spirit) and *res corporea* (body or matter). Generally, there are three substances in Descartes' philosophy: God, mind, and body. In this sense, what is man? The human body is simply an extended thing, spatially moving quantity, a machine, and the object of mechanics. *Cogito* is the thinking side of man. How do these two distinct substances occur in the unity of man? This is Descartes' real problem because they are two distinct substances. His answer is that man consists of two substances, which are in principle and essence separate and independent of each other. Man as the unity of *cogito* and body forces Descartes to admit that *cogito* and the body exercise a certain influence on each other. Descartes tries to resolve the participation of *cogito* and the body in man by the location of the *cogito* (soul) in the pineal gland. Through *anima*-spirit, the soul can influence the movement of the body. However, Descartes is not satisfied with this answer because his unification of mind and body is a physiological rather than a metaphysical or philosophical answer. Therefore, it seems that Descartes does not answer how mind and body can be unified in man if they are two distinct substances apart from each other.

Traditional ontology prevents Descartes from seeing his way into a deeper grasp of the problem of the ontology of Dasein and he ignores the phenomena of the world. Consequently, Descartes takes the Being of man in the same way he takes the Being of *res corporea*. He sees entities within the world as possessing a material nature so he makes an ontological basis for entities within the world (understood as Things of Nature). In this sense, "Descartes has narrowed down the question of the world to that of Things of Nature as those entities within-the-world which are proximally accessible."<sup>2</sup> If Being is neither the body (*res corporea*) nor the spirit (*res cogito*), then what kind of Being is there in the world? Dasein can ask about Being because it is distinct from other beings. Dasein can discover the traditional, preserve it, or study and investigate it. Man is Being-in-the-world, and "if no Dasein (man) exists, no world is 'there'

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<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. (New York: Harper & Row, Pub., 1962), 133.

either.”<sup>3</sup> Dasein can be understood as man.

Heidegger’s interpretation of Being is limited to Dasein as Being-in-the-world in his work *Being and Time*. How does Heidegger interpret Being-in-the-world? What does he mean by “Being-in” and “the-world”? What distinguishes Heidegger’s understanding of Being-in-the-world from entities-in-the-world? All these question are essential to understand and to interpret the relationship between man, Being, and world.

Dasein as Being-in-the-world is not to be thought of as a characteristic of objects which are spatially located with respect to other objects. Objects are understood as present-at-hand because they are understood as isolated substances. Being-in-the-world does not mean to occur in the so-called world in the totality of beings. The “world” of Being-in-the-world is not a sum of things as present-at-hand. Heidegger does not comprehend the world in terms of how beings can show themselves. The world in which Dasein is located factually is not to Being-in-the-world because Dasein exists in the manner of Being-in-the-world.<sup>4</sup>

Being- in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein’s Being; it is an *existential*. So one cannot think of it as the Being- present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as human body) “in” an entity which present-at-hand. Nor does the term “Being-in” mean a spatial “in-one-another-ness” of thing present-at-hand, any more than the world “in” primordially signifies a spatial relationship of this kind. “In” is derived from “innan” – “to reside”, “habitare”, “to dwell”.<sup>5</sup>

For Heidegger, the *existential* of Dasein’s Being or Being-in means “to reside alongside” or “to be familiar with”. In other words, “*Being in is ... the formal existential expression for the Being Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as it state.*”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Heidegger distinguishes the concept “Being alongside” from the things present-at-hand. “As an *existential*, ‘Being alongside’ the world never means anything like the Being- present-at-hand together of things that occur. There is no such thing as the ‘side-by-hand’ of an entity called

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>4</sup> Okrent, Mark. *Heidegger Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics*. (Ithata: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 79, 80.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 80

‘Dasein’ with another entity called ‘world’.<sup>7</sup> For example, the world never touches the other world in the sense of existential because the entities cannot be encountered with each other. Thus, Heidegger maintains that “when two entities are present-at-hand within the world... they can never ‘touch’ each other, nor can either of them ‘be alongside’ the other.”<sup>8</sup>

*However, in the Cartesian understanding of the world, the world of nature is filled with things, houses, trees, people, animals, stars, events, etc. Traditionally, substances, as things existing within the world, have been approached as ontologically as present-at-hand. In this sense, both things and men are found in the world of nature. Being-in-the-world must nevertheless be understood not only as things-in-the-world. There are things-in-the-world such as trees, house, stones, etc, but Being-in-the-world is more than just another thing-in-the-world. This separation gives rise to the problem of subject and object distinction. For Heidegger, Being-in-the-world as Dasein may be interpreted as the subject in terms of traditional philosophy. It cannot be identified with the subject of the traditional world because Dasein is not separated from the world; it is in the world. “Being-in” means that Dasein is essentially a dwelling in and familiarity with the world.*

For Heidegger, the most general characteristics of the entities (present-at-hand entities) are called “categories”. But categories are not the character of Dasein since the most general characteristics of Dasein are called *existential*. Heidegger states that “Dasein’s characters of Being are defined in terms of existentiality, we call them *existential*. These are to be sharply distinguished from what we call *categories* - characteristics of Being for entities whose character is not that of Dasein.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Dasein’s characters of Being are totally different from the characteristics of Being as entities. Being in as an *existential* is not the Being present-at-hand of any corporeal thing: In other words, Dasein as Being-in-the-world is not a human body, which is a spatial relationship with regard to other entities. Dasein’s essential structure is not to have a corporeal body, but it is an *existential*. Consequently, the Cartesian project of extended substances understood as present-at-hand cannot signify the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 70.

most general characteristics of Being of Dasein. Dasein's Being must be interpreted within its existential structure rather than its categorial structure. "...the concept of Being must be articulated ... because this structure is in principle one which cannot be grasped by the traditional ontological categories..."<sup>10</sup>

Although Heidegger distinguishes Being-in-the-world as Dasein from beings present-at-hand, he thinks that Dasein has a Being-in-space; in other words, Dasein is also in space. However, if Dasein's being-in-space is considered as a spatial property in a world, then offering Dasein's Being-in-the-world is understood in terms of present-at-hand. This interpretation makes Dasein's Being a spatial entity along with being a corporeal thing. But this would be an incorrect interpretation of Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Dasein's ontic spatiality is not an essential structure of its existence but one must understand Dasein's Being-in-the-world as an essential structure of Dasein in its existential spatiality. In its existential spatiality, Dasein always disperses itself into definite ways of Being-in. All dispersing ways of Being-in have concern which basically means to carry out something, to get it done, to straighten it out, to provide oneself with something.<sup>11</sup>

Dasein is in the world, of course, as a body, occupying a space among other object like any corporeal entity. However, its spatiality as a material body is not what characterizes most essentially the relationship of Dasein's Being to things and to other Daseins. The relationship of Dasein to Being-in-the-world is based on its concern (*Besorgen*). Heidegger does not use the expression "concern" in its ontical significations, but he does use it in its ontological meaning as an *existentiale*, which designates Being as a possible way of Being-in-the-world. Heidegger chooses the term "concern" because "The Being of Dasein itself is to be made visible as care".<sup>12</sup> The phenomenon of concern shows that Dasein's world is a world of meaningful relations of Dasein. Therefore, Dasein's Being-in-the-world is essentially "care" - an *existentiale* for Dasein's Being as Being-in-the-world. The analytic structure of care as Dasein's Being-in-the-world can be examined either authentically or inauthentically: The authentic analytic structure of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 84.

Dasein's comportments is state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding (*Verstehen*), and discourse (*Rede*). The inauthentic comportments of Dasein's Being-in-the-world as Care are ambiguity (*zweideutigkeit*), curiosity (*Neugier*), and idle talk (*Gerede*).

For Heidegger the world cannot be interpreted in terms of nature as Descartes did because nature can be comprehended only in so far as it is present-at-hand. Contrary to nature, the world in Heidegger's thinking is comprehended as ready-at-hand. Moreover, contrary to a mathematical grasp of the Cartesian world, Heidegger's interpretation of Dasein as Being-in-the-world, which has always been thrown into the world, is essentially care. For Heidegger, reality as things present-at-hand is not a reality of the phenomenon of Dasein; it is not only a natural world. That is to say, the realities of the natural world are not the realities of Dasein's world as Being-in-the-world and care. What is the relation between reality and care? Heidegger must answer this question because Reality as present-at-hand, in traditional ontology, shows itself as belonging to the natural world. However, as we have already discussed, the thing present-at-hand does not represent Being-in-the-world; so the reality of the Being-in-the-world is different from the reality of present-at-hand in the existential- ontological sense.

Entities are conceived as in a context of things (*res*), which are present-at-hand, and substantiality is the basic characteristic of being for the traditional ontology, and ontic entities are conceived as Real. In this sense, "Dasein too is present-at-hand as Real."<sup>13</sup> Reality is understood in terms of epistemology, i.e., how a knower knows the external world. The traditional philosophical understanding of Reality is based upon the dualistic idea of mind and matter. For example, for Descartes, the real is *cogito* because *cogito* as the most clear and distinct idea, and it is indubitable. After accepting the reality of *cogito*, Descartes goes on to prove the external world. Starting with Descartes, the traditional ontology takes the entities of the external world as Real, and Real is to be proved in the context of epistemology. Heidegger claims that Reality must be interpreted in its ontological basis because it is not our task to prove whether there is Reality and the external world. This is the so-called "scandal of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 245.

philosophy.”<sup>14</sup> Reality must be ontologically established in the Being of Dasein as an understanding of Being because Reality is not something present-at-hand. Reality is something ready-to-hand and based on the understanding of Being. Since Being is dependent on the understanding of Being, Reality is dependent upon care.<sup>15</sup> When Dasein does not exist, there is no understanding of Being.

Of course, as long as Dasein is (i.e., only as long as an understanding of Being is ontically possible), there is Being. When Dasein does not exist, “independence” does not exist either, nor does the “in-itself”; in such a case this sort of thing can be neither understood nor not understood. In such a case even entities within-the-world can neither be discovered nor lie hidden. *In such a case* it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not. But now, as long as there is an understanding of Being, and therefore an understanding of presence-at-hand, it can indeed be said that *in this case* entities will still continue to be.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, as long as there is an understanding of Being, entities become accessible. The understanding of Being as Care makes possible the phenomenon of Reality in its ontological structure. In this sense, the Cartesian assertion *cogito sum* must be turned around. In the new phenomenological-ontological approach, the *sum* must be asserted first. I am in the world as potentiality-for-Being precedes the cogitare of *res cogitans*. “I am in the world” as an understanding of Being reveals Reality ontologically upon the phenomenon of care.

According to Heidegger, one cannot accept the traditional explanation of a subject-knowing object as the basis of the investigation of Being-in-the-world because Being-in-the-world is more than the traditional account of it. Therefore, we must look at what we do in our everyday lives, in which we encounter the being of those being closest to us. These beings are called “equipment” (*Zeug*). Therefore, the world of Dasein lies in its everydayness, but things of natural world lie amidst the environment present-at-hand: The world of Dasein is not merely the environment, but the beings which we meet every day and is ready-at-hand, a piece of equipment with involvement, purpose, and with meaning. He states that

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 255.

We shall call these entities, which we encounter in concern “*equipment*”. In our dealing we come across equipment for writing, sewing, working, transportation, measurement. The kind of Being which equipment possesses must be exhibited. The clue for doing this lies in our first defining what makes an item of equipment - namely, its equipmentality.<sup>17</sup>

Equipment is essentially something in-order-to. To Heidegger, in-order-to means an assignment or reference of something-to-something. Equipment is understood in terms of its belonging to other equipment. For something to function as equipment for Heidegger, there must be a nexus to other equipment in which this thing functions.<sup>18</sup> There is not equipment, but there are equipments in the equipmental whole.

Heidegger states the same idea in his *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* that “the *nearest things* that surround us we call *equipment*. There is always already a manifold of equipment: Equipment for working, for traveling, for measuring ... what is given to us primarily is the unity of an *equipmental whole*.”<sup>19</sup> The equipmental whole stands in the sight of practical circumspection because “circumspection uncovers and understands beings primarily as equipment”.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, each particular equipmental thing has a special reference to another particular equipmental thing. In other words, each piece of equipment has a specific functionality, i.e., in-order-to-ness. However, this functionality is not a relational whole. It is a pre-understanding: “As we exist factually, we are always already in an envioning world.”<sup>21</sup>

One cannot understand anything ready-to-hand when one looks at the “outward appearance” of things because, for Heidegger, a theoretical looking does not reveal the comprehension of readiness-to-hand. Contrary to a theoretical attitude, one must deal with entities by using them and manipulating them. Heidegger calls this kind of dealing with equipment as “circumspection”. Therefore, “theoretical behavior is just looking without

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>18</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 63.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 163.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 164.



circumspection”.<sup>22</sup> However, “the ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all...”<sup>23</sup> For Heidegger, our everyday experiences with equipment are not the test itself but the work which is to be produced as the “towards-which”, i.e., for usability, for functionality. Therefore, “in equipment that is used, ‘Nature’ is discovered along with it by that use - the ‘Nature’ we find in natural products.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, nature is not to be understood as present-at-hand-things. Traditional accounts of nature as present-at-hand is rejected by Heidegger, and manipulation and usage of nature is understood as ready-to-hand in order to use something for something else.

Heidegger defines ready-to-hand as equipment with “reference” or “assignment”. Assignment can be more explicit when something is unusable for some purpose; this is the ontological structure. Assignment and reference both possess the characteristics of in-order-to and serviceability-for. They are an ontologico-categorical attribute of equipment *qua* equipment.<sup>25</sup> For Heidegger, the world cannot be discovered thematically because in anything ready-to-hand the world is always there and whenever we encounter anything the world has already been previously discovered.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, ready-to-hand as equipment is just such an involvement which implies assignment or reference as the relationship of the “with...in...”<sup>27</sup> Heidegger understands involvement ontologically, so Dasein always assigns itself from a for-the-sake-of to the “with-which” as an involvement. In other words, Dasein understands itself beforehand in its worldhood of the world.

The world is not nature, nor an extant, nor the totality of things. The world is the contexture of equipment as the envioning world, *Umwelt*. The world must be understood as beforehand not afterward. “Beforehand as that which stands forth as always already unveiled to us.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, we are always already in a world. As an existing being, Dasein always understands the world in advance as in-order-to or being-for. Heidegger calls this understanding of the world as the phenomenological understanding of the

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, 99.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 165.

world, which is different from the ordinary pre-philosophical concept of the world. In the phenomenological concept of world, “a chair does not have Being-in-the world’s mode of Being, but it occurs within the intra-wordly extent.”<sup>29</sup> The world is something *Da* of Dasein. It is not in extent things, but it is there-here like Dasein. The world exists.

Furthermore, Heidegger distinguishes knowing Being-in-the-world from knowing entities present-at-hand. Dasein’s Being-in-the-world cannot be grasped as present-at-hand because Dasein’s Being-in-the-world is more basic than knowledge of present-at-hand entities. In other words, our knowing cannot be explained as present-at-hand because knowing cannot give us access to things in themselves. Knowing, in the traditional fashion, is understood as a relation between subject and object. This interpretation makes knowing as present-at-hand and knowing becomes a problem of how the subject knows its objects. All various attempts to this problem forget to ask what kind of Being belongs to this knowing. Contrary to this forgetfulness of tradition, Heidegger maintains that the phenomenon of knowing is a mode of Being of Dasein as Being-in-the-world, i.e., “knowing is a kind of Being which belongs to Being-in-the-world.”<sup>30</sup> Because knowing is grounded beforehand in a Being-already-alongside-the-world, therefore, “Being-in-the-world, as concern, is *fascinated by* the world with which it is concerned.”<sup>31</sup> For Heidegger our access to entities depends on our concern with understanding. So, there is no ontological basis towards the present-at-hand. Our concerned understanding cannot be grasped as present-at-hand.<sup>32</sup> Heidegger maintains that Being-in-the-world is more fundamental than our theoretical activity, i.e., our concerned understanding is more basic than the idea of present-at-hand because, for him, present-at-hand is dependent on our concerned understanding. Heidegger says that philosophical traditions have operated within a too narrow conception of Being as present-at-hand because the understanding of Being as present-at-hand operates in a concealed fashion; for example, “when Descartes insists upon extension as

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Okrent, *Heidegger Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 32.

essential to any corporeal substance, he does so on the basis of an understanding of substantiality as constant present-at-hand, an understanding he is not able to articulate. And this is why he is also unable to make clear the basis of the 'analogy' by which Being applies to his three types of Substances."<sup>33</sup>

Heidegger's understanding of world belongs to Dasein's Being that I myself in each instance am; so the world is subjective. "If the world is not something extant but belongs to the Dasein's Being, then it is something subjective."<sup>34</sup> "To say that the world is subjective is to say it belongs to the Dasein, insofar as this being is in the mode of Being-in-the-world. The world is something which is the 'subject' 'project-outward' as it were, from within itself."<sup>35</sup> As long as Dasein exists, the world is cast-forth with Dasein's Being. Dasein exists in such a way with the thrownness of this projection. Therefore, Being-in-the-world belongs to the concept of existence, and factually existent Dasein is always already Being-with intra-worldly beings. Consequently, "the world is only, if and as long as a Dasein exists. Nature can also be when no Dasein exists."<sup>36</sup> Dasein projects a world for itself. In its projection, Dasein has always already stepped out beyond itself, and the world is not something like a subjective inner sphere, but the world belongs to Dasein's Being, which exists for the sake of its own self or in each case mine. When the factual existent Dasein chooses itself for the sake of its own self, then it exists authentically. But sometimes it can let itself be determined in its being by others, so that it exists inauthentically. Inauthentic existence does not mean an unguenuine existence. Authentic of Dasein is a modification of an inauthentic existence of Dasein, and an inauthentic existence belongs to Dasein's essential nature of existence.

The world is not anything that occurs within the realm of the extended substances, but belongs to the subject, i.e., it is subjective. For this reason, the mode of Being of Dasein is determined at the same time by the phenomenon of the world. In the idea of Being-in-the-world, Dasein and the

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<sup>33</sup> John Richardson, *Existential Epistemology: A Heideggerian Critique of the Cartesian Project* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 122.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 167.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 70.

world combine as the basic determination of existence. This structure of Dasein differs from the extended things of nature. Although Heidegger sees this monadological interpretation of beings in Leibniz, he thinks that Leibniz embedded his genuine intuition in traditional ontology. For Heidegger, the philosophy of Leibniz is influenced by the traditional theory of substance and Leibniz carries the same problems as well.

In conclusion, self-understanding cannot be reduced to a reflective ego-experience. It must be determined by the mode of being of Dasein in its basic form of authenticity and inauthenticity of existence. Heidegger's understanding of Dasein as Being-in-the-world is not the *cogito* of Descartes and is not the pure consciousness of Husserl. Rather, it is existence taken as the essence of Dasein and is characterized by Being-in-the-world, care, finitude, temporality, and historicity. Being-in-the-world belongs to the Dasein's ontological constitution. Nature, extant entities, can be without a Dasein existing because Dasein's world is not the natural world but, rather, a phenomenal world. The phenomenal world is more than the natural world, and Dasein cannot exist without phenomenal world because the phenomenal world belongs to Dasein's Being. Therefore, in a traditional sense, there are radical differences of ontological constitution between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. Both are disparate and incompatible; they cannot be determined by the way of a uniform concept of being in general." Existence and extantness are more disparate than, say, the determinations of God's being in traditional ontology."<sup>37</sup>

Unlike Descartes, Heidegger rejects the idea that any world isolates the subject who gives meaning to order minds and to the shared intersubjective world. Heidegger maintains that there is no separate, private world than the shared public world. Contrary to my world, the world is always prior to my world. Heidegger says that "Being-in-the-world, we have shown that a bare subject without a world never 'is' proximately, nor is it given ... 'the Others' already *are there with us* in Being-in-the-world."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, there is no man's nature as Descartes' distinction of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Man and the world can never be separated. Heidegger holds that "the theme of our analytic is to be Being-in-the-world,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 152.

and accordingly the very world itself.”<sup>39</sup> Dualism is a foreign concept for Heidegger. Man is the totality of his relationships to the world. Totality does not mean a sum of the things in the natural world but the unity of Dasein’s world. Dasein is not to be thought of as a worldless subject from whom (since Descartes) the attempt had to be made repeatedly to bridge between it and the world. Dasein, as a Being-in-the-world, is always already alongside of the world.<sup>40</sup> Eighteenth century German academic philosophy contrasted the world as the totality of finite beings with that which is an *ens creatum* as Kant defined it. Therefore, the world becomes a name for finite human experience as a whole. However, Heidegger believes that the world belongs to a relational structure that is characteristic for Dasein as such.

Our understanding, in the Heideggerian sense, of world is pre-ontological. Being-in-the-world must be seen as a state of Dasein; otherwise we cannot grasp the phenomenon of worldhood. If one interprets worldhood in terms of things present-at-hand and within-the-world, one discovers nature but not the phenomenon of worldhood. “*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’.”<sup>41</sup> This is because a phenomenon of the world is an *existentiale* and Things of nature are categorical and present-at-hand. Heidegger calls this kind of seeing as “traditional ontology in a blind alley.”<sup>42</sup> Heidegger distinguishes the worldhood of the world from both entities ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. He states that

(1) The Being of those entities within-in-the-world which we proximately encounter-readiness-to-hand; (2) the Being of those entities which we can come across and whose nature we can determine if we discover then in their own right by going through the entities proximately encountered-present-at-hand, (3) the Being of that ontical condition which makes it possible for entities with-the-world to be discovered at

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>40</sup> Pöggeler, Otto. “Being as Appropriation” *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*. (Edited by Michael Murray. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1978), 87.

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, 92.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 94.

all-the worldhood of the world.<sup>43</sup>

Heidegger believes that the third rendition of ready-to-hand gives us an existential way of determining the nature of Being-in-the-world, that is, of Dasein. Contrary to the third rendition, the first two are categories. Therefore, we may say that Dasein is not extant or a thing among things, but “Dasein exists in a manner of being-in-the-world and this basic determination of its existence is the presupposition for being able to apprehend anything at all.”<sup>44</sup> The expression of being-in-the-world helps us to see that the world is not a space-time coordinated system filled with a collection of objects as the Cartesian model says.

However, according to Versenyi, Heidegger continues the same problem that Kant addressed: The independence of subject and the external world was replaced by the problem of the independence of Dasein and its world in Heidegger’s thought.<sup>45</sup> For Heidegger, the world belongs to Dasein because it is what it is only with the existence of Dasein. In as much as Dasein exists, the world exists. Furthermore, Dasein and the world are neither independent nor related as one being to another but refer to the same entity which is called Dasein as Being-in-the-world.

Descartes’ view of the world is an epistemological worldview because Descartes’ question of Being lies in his method of doubt. And Descartes’ method of doubt is grounded on the critique of his knowledge. In other words, the act of questioning Being is not an ontological inquiry but an epistemological inquiry. Contrary to Descartes’ questioning of Being, Heidegger’s questioning of Being as Dasein-in-the-world is an existential-ontological inquiry and this questioning of Being needs an ontological foundation. Heidegger takes Descartes’ *cogito sum* as an example in order to show that an epistemological foundation of Being does not reveal its ontological foundation, i.e., one cannot go from epistemology in the questioning of the meaning of Being. Therefore, epistemology must be grounded in ontology and *cogito* must be grounded in *sum*. The reversal is an inauthentic interpretation of Dasein itself. The Being of Dasein must be grounded upon Being-in-the-world.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 164.

<sup>45</sup> Laszlo Versenyi, *Heidegger, Being, and Truth*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 31.

## The Volcanic Structure of Objects: Metaphysics after Heidegger

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Large structures must be built on bedrock, or they are doomed to collapse in the tremors and tsunamis that strike everywhere in the centuries to come. Likewise, philosophies fall into rubble in shifting winds, unless they are built on pillars extending to a great depth.

For contemporary philosophy, bedrock means the work of Heidegger. Whether we affirm him, expand him, or overturn him, he is the philosopher of our time, and whatever innovations we dream up today must occasionally be checked or measured against what he has written. While this statement may not meet with universal agreement, it will shock no one, since Heidegger already displays at least three signs of a classic thinker. First, he appeals to every portion of the political spectrum: this confirmed Nazi does not drive away most Jewish readers, Marxist readers, or Churchillians. Like Nietzsche, he is equally beloved from the Left and the Right, a very good sign, since he is respected for the right reasons, and not simply because he helps one's own team to win, the sure mark of a second-tier thinker. Further, Heidegger is increasingly useful to all philosophical movements: gone are the days when analytic philosophers called him "meaningless." Virtually every camp in philosophy today tries to appropriate Heidegger and read him as an ally. Next, he has even more followers outside his own nation than within it: this is important, since lesser thinkers can be equally idolized at home, provided that they swing a sufficiently heavy institutional cudgel, or appeal uniquely to one nation's most unusual tastes, just as swallowing live eels is celebrated in certain obscure national cuisines. The final test, always the most important, is to outlive one's own time. It is too early to give a verdict here, but so far Heidegger shows every sign of surviving the dangerous transition from latest great thing to aged mentor. He seems largely immune to the decay of the *Zeitgeist*. Like the bedrock in the earth, he seems untouched so far by seasonal erosions of the soil, by floods and

sandstorms, by continental drift.

Within Heidegger's work, one idea in particular seems especially immovable, though it appears under several names. I refer to the question of the meaning of being, which rightly appears in the first paragraph of any encyclopedia article on Heidegger and any real or imagined obituary. Generally, one lays stress on the elusiveness of the question of being, its irreducibility to any simple answer. But in fact, the question of being does receive a clear preliminary answer, if a negative one—namely, being is not something present-at-hand. It is not phenomenal, not an *eidōs*, not physical atoms, not substance, not something produced or represented. Instead, it is something that recedes from every view. This critique of presence takes its most concrete form in the tool-analysis, which is Heidegger's earliest original discovery as well as his most popular. And where many readers see a theory of practical action in the tool-analysis, we should actually see the germ of a strange and unruly system of *metaphysics*, a term that Heidegger himself condemns. What we find in Heidegger is not a metaphysics of presence, but a weird metaphysics in which objects roam the earth like ghosts, inflicting curses and wounds on everything they touch. This insight can be developed in less poetic terms.

### **Tool-Analysis**

The most widely discussed passage in Heidegger is probably the famous tool-analysis of *Being and Time*. In fact, the analysis appears much earlier, in Heidegger's oldest surviving lecture course, delivered in 1919; it is also the guiding star of many later works such as "The Thing" and *On the Way to Language*, and in this way weaves through his career from one end to the other. It marks his original rupture with Husserl, and also the surplus of "unthought" that he himself never mastered, and which is left to all of us to develop. Ignoring the usual procedure of saying that thinking cannot be forced or scheduled, let's do something that would have appalled Heidegger himself, and set a deadline for this development, much like architects or engineers. Let's stipulate that the tool-analysis needs to have received its full development by the centennial year, 2019. Although specific punishments for failure are difficult to imagine, the sense of urgency is important, and may inspire others to join in the effort. But first, please note



the following point of terminology: in these pages, I abandon Heidegger's fruitless distinction between "things" and "objects," and use the terms interchangeably. For Heidegger, of course, "object" is a term of abuse, and refers first to things reduced to objects of human representation, and refers ultimately to technological nullities such as styrofoam and spandex as opposed to genuine things such as wooden and woolen rural handicraft. This is sheer prejudice on Heidegger's part, as will be described again below. To repeat, the word "object" will not be used here as an insult, but as a general term for any specific entity whatsoever, entirely synonymous with "thing."

We now turn to the tool-analysis. While the analysis is already widely known, its full treasures remain unnoticed. In its usual presentation, it runs something like this: our primary relation to a wrench or bulldozer does not involve theoretical concepts, since these things far exceed any theoretical representation of them. They also exceed any visual or tactile perception of them, since no representation grasps objects in their being. The object is a surplus or depth beyond any concept or any visibility. We encounter it primarily through taking it for granted, and this is why the experience of the broken or missing tool is so important, since it alerts us for the first time to the things we are using. In this way, Heidegger is often read as a philosopher who defends the primacy of practical over theoretical reason, or the shadowy background horizons of interpretation over lucid observing consciousness. He becomes either a pragmatist or a hermeneutic philosopher, depending on our preferences. This is the usual reading of the tool-analysis, but the usual reading fails in ways that have cost continental philosophy several decades in an anti-realist, anti-metaphysical trap of its own creation.

Consider this: objects hide from praxis every bit as much as they hide from theory. It is certainly true that jigsaws, satellite dishes, and tranquillizer guns recede into a silent background behind any concept or perception of them. But it is equally true that they withdraw from all practical handling. When I stare at a potter's wheel or hydroelectric dam, its being exceeds the one-dimensional caricature I make of these objects. But the same is true when I unconsciously use them, rely upon them, take them for granted. Praxis is also surprised, not just theory. Practical reason can have no primacy over theoretical reason, because the secret life of objects

has primacy over both. This is clear even from Heidegger's own statement of the tool-analysis: after all, in most of the examples of surprise or breakdown, it is unconscious action that is surprised, not lucid theory or sun-kissed visual perception. The point is not that praxis is deeper than theory, but that objects are deeper than any relation we can possibly have with them, whether conscious, unconscious, half-consciousness, manipulative, or delusional. This should have been seen. If it had been, we would no longer be faced with readings of Heidegger that see him as a philosopher of human existence, or of a supposedly superhuman Being that still only appears through its call to humans. Heidegger would have been transformed into a philosopher of objects, which I regard as the only legitimate path for interpreting him. Since the tool-analysis makes objects more real than any relation that humans have with them, it turns Heidegger into a kind of realist. But this is not the dull realism of tiny billiard balls smacking one another, since Heidegger's tools always remain a mystery, receding into their own most silent depths. It is also not the dreary old-fashioned realism of adequating one's mind to a static outer landscape. It is a weird realism, because objects themselves hover through the world like invisible insects flashing from time to time during the night. Objects withdraw entirely from all relations, yet somehow still manage to unleash brutal causal forces against one another. It is also a metaphysics—not the despised “metaphysics of presence,” since no privileged object becomes directly present to explain all the others as its mere servants and derivatives. In more pedantic terms, there is no longer an ontotheological hierarchy of objects, but an utter plurality and opacity of objects withholding themselves to some extent from every relation. In this way, Heidegger can be read as an object-oriented philosopher, a weird realist, and a guerrilla metaphysician, the three terms being perfectly interchangeable.

All of this could have been seen if only the obvious step had been taken of seeing that objects have no more in common with unconscious handling than they do with conscious theory. But there is a further step that must be taken, one sufficiently bizarre that no one can be blamed for missing it. Namely, objects withdraw not only from human contact, but even from each other. Just as cotton remains concealed from the worker who uses

it and the botanist who studies it, it remains equally remote in its being from the wind that blows it and the fire that burns it. Yes, the human mind does seem to have numerous marvelous abilities that do not belong to gravel and tree bark. But this does not mean that Heidegger's tool-analysis truly accounts for such a difference. The withdrawal of tool-beings in the analysis actually has nothing to do with unique human mental skills or animal perception at all. The hammer withdraws from us not because we have brains and retinas to distort it, but only because we are not the hammer, and our relation to the hammer can never fully express the unfathomable being of that object. In other words, the tool-analysis is not about the difference between implicit and explicit, but rather something like the difference between substance and relation. More on this a bit later.

This step appears strange to those who hear it for the first time, but I see no way around it. My handling, perceiving, or conceptualizing of an abandoned boxcar distorts the inner reality of that boxcar, because it will always enjoy a surplus of reality beyond all of my feeble attempts to come to terms with it. This is equally true whether I am a lazy drug-abusing slacker squatting in the boxcar during a difficult winter, or an upstanding phenomenologist flawlessly describing its outer contours. But the boxcar is equally elusive for all the hailstones, beetles, stray bullets, and nuclear shockwaves that strike it. None of these other entities fully measure the boxcar or adequately sound its depths. No relationship at all, whether intellectual, practical, or primitively causal, can ever allow any entity to become fully present to any other. Objects love to hide.

In the past week, a prominent French philosopher made the following objection to this theory: why *presuppose* a separation between objects? Why not begin by assuming a togetherness of all parts of reality? Although worth taking seriously, this objection soon collapses. Far from presupposing a separation, a togetherness *was* presupposed, but was demolished by the tool-analysis. We begin by imagining the tender cooperation and companionships of ourselves and the hammer, and find that this unity is subverted. The objects are in part strangers to us, not just intimate friends. Every attempt to assume a unity is undercut by shocking surprises.

More generally speaking, it is a widespread dogma in present-day philosophy that states of affairs are more real than substances, that the world

is the totality of facts rather than things. What seems to be immediately given are highly detailed specific situations, and any assumption of independent actors apart from that situation seems to be a horrific residue of old-fashioned realism. Many consider it the philosophical gesture par excellence to knock down any notion of autonomous objects apart from the silky-smooth holistic network of the world. But this priority of states of affairs over things cannot be maintained. For one thing, it pretends to be metaphysically neutral, but is not. It actually presupposes an entire metaphysical system in which the whole precedes the parts, all things are plugged into one another, nothing lies outside the system of relations and events, and so forth. Worse yet, it is not phenomenologically valid: what we see in our experience are not sheer states of affairs, but ideal objects that we recognize (or think we recognize) despite all the constant variations of accidents fluttering along their surface. As we circle the Washington Monument or the ruins of devastated structures, we never imagine that the object of our perception is changing every millisecond, not even if we are moving at extremely high speed. In other words, we look right through the states of affairs of the world toward certain underlying, enduring nuclei that seem to endure through the variations. Perception is object-oriented, and not guided at all by states of affairs, situations, holistic networks, or events. Perception has always broken up the world into independent chunks or discrete quanta of strange withdrawn realities.

There are two additional reasons that we cannot abandon independent objects in favor of a network-philosophy of states of affairs. If we imagine the world as an all-embracing, holistic network, there are at least two things that cannot be explained. First, it is impossible to explain how there can be multiple independent perspectives on the same object. If there is no Pittsburgh, but only a series of views of the city, then each of us can be said to experience the “same” city only as a kind of metaphor. And this is sheer dogma, since it merely presupposes that one particular view of Pittsburgh is more real than the city itself as an independent underlying thing, a view refuted by Husserl and Heidegger alike, each in his own way. Second, if the entire world were merely an integrated network, it would be impossible to explain why anything would ever change. If there is no surplus in the things beyond their current relations

with one another, it is impossible to see why the current network of the world would be driven forward into a new state of affairs.

Heidegger's first great insight is the unremitting duel between the presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand of an object, remembering always that ready-to-hand does not mean "useful," but actually "that which exceeds all perception *and* all use." There is a single, permanent, repetitive strife throughout Heidegger's somewhat monotonous career: concealing and revealing, sheltering and clearing, *Enteignis* and *Ereignis*, being and beings, being and time. All of these oppositions are so recurrent, and so deeply synonymous, that we might easily believe Heidegger's dictum, that every great thinker has only one thought. However, Heidegger actually has *two* separate thoughts, and the second one is known as "fourfold," that famously precious and sometimes annoying doctrine that first appears by name in 1949. But I for one find it to be Heidegger's most important idea, and the key to taking a further step beyond his own philosophical efforts. A brief explanation of this shadowy concept is in order.

### **Fourfold**

The history of human thought is filled with fourfold structures. In the philosophies of West and East, and in the private systems of charlatans, cranks, and swindlers, cases of quadruple structures of the world are not difficult to come by. As a rule, all of the fourfold systems, whether serious, flippant, or outright fraudulent, result from the intersection of two principles of division. Two dichotomies cross through the heart of the world, carving the universe into four discrete zones. In Heidegger, these infamous districts are known as earth and sky, gods and mortals. In addition, the four are said to reflect one another in a mirror-play. For Heidegger's fourfold, then, two questions are necessary. First, what are the two great axes of the world that give rise to the fourfold, which seems so arbitrary at first glance? Second, what is the mirror-play between each of the four poles?

The first principle of division in Heidegger is not hard to find, since it dominates his work with a crushing monotony, a monotony redeemed only by its inexhaustible depth. There is probably no page of his writings not dominated by the interplay between shadow and light, concealing and revealing, thrownness and projection, being and beings, being and time. More generally, the presence of objects is always shadowed by their integral autonomous reality,

their subterranean execution or innermost intimate being. The tool-being withdraws into its concealed private depth while also somehow emitting present-at-hand contours to be seen, theorized, or manipulated. But all presence is a form of relation. For an object to be present to human Dasein, reindeer, maple trees, or chunks of iron ore, means for the object to exist in relation to these things, to run up against them and register their presence against those things. In similar fashion, for the object to withdraw into its private depths means to exceed those relations, to be immune to them. The object exists in autonomous serenity quite apart from all the meetings, affairs, and crimes in which it might become involved. The single overpowering dualism in Heidegger's philosophy *is* the rift between ready-to-hand and present-at-hand, or their more prestigious synonyms. The ontological difference in Heidegger is not some abstract "horizon" for the duel between objects and their being, but rather this very duel itself. And for the reasons just mentioned, this mortal strife between the screwdriver and all the facades and haloes it generates can also be called the difference between substance and relation. Although Heidegger trains us to avoid such classical terms like the plague, they are perfectly useful with only minor adjustments. More on this later.

In short, for much of the Heidegger *Gesamtausgabe*, it really does seem as though Heidegger has only one great idea: the reversal between an object and its presence, or its underground private execution and its relational appearance to other objects. This inspiring monotony is reflected in the equal monotony of Heidegger's sense of humor, which consists (with just two corny exceptions) of a single great joke resounding throughout his works. This famous joke involves the word *bloß*, mere or merely. A pile of rocks is no mere aggregate of present-at-hand material. When we encounter a loiterer on the sidewalk, this is not the mere presence-at-hand of a person-thing. "*Polla ta deina*" in the famous Antigone chorus does not refer to a mere present-at-hand multitude of uncanny entities. There are literally several thousand small wisecracks of this kind in Heidegger. At times, the whole of his philosophy seems to amount to nothing more than this single insight, as simple and pure as a pre-Socratic teaching: an object is shadowed by its being.

However, there is a second idea, or second axis of division. Unlike the endless play of presence and absence, which has nourished several decades

of post-Heideggerian philosophy, the second axis is somewhat dry and feeble, but undeniably there. Only if we are brutally candid about the monotony of the rest of Heidegger do we begin to starve for some new principle in his work, however faint, and only this allows us to find it. But in fact, this second principle appears in Heidegger at the earliest possible date, in the same 1919 lecture course where the famous tool-analysis is born. He begins with the distinction between objects as *Ereignis* and *Vorgang*, or as real events and mere present-at-hand occurrences. This is the old familiar song of shadow and clearing, absence and presence. But under Husserl's influence, a second distinction appears, and this will eventually generate the fourfold, three decades later. Whether we speak of a package bomb as concealed underground event, or as visible surface occurrence, in both cases a second distinction can be made. This is the difference between a specific something and something at all. On the one hand, we can say that the package bomb is brown, that brown is a color, that color is extended, and so forth, proceeding by way of levels. The bomb is one specific reality among others, including certain qualities rather than others, and we uncover them gradually. On the other hand, we can trump these step-by-step descriptions by firing the pistol-shot of the word "is": the package bomb *is*, the brown *is*, the color *is*, the extension *is*. Each level of the analysis has a direct relationship with being, quite outside of the hierarchical progression through layers of the world. This distinction in the young Heidegger can largely be identified with Husserl's eidetic and phenomenological reductions, or between essence and existence. And insofar as, following Aristotle, to be is to be one, we can describe this second axis in Heidegger as the duel between unity and particularity. To repeat, the object is both concealed and revealed, and exists as one and as something in particular.

This is not just some quirky, pedantic historical exercise for the young Heidegger, since the tension between these two axes reappears at regular intervals in his thought. Next comes 1929, in which the second axis is expressed in a famous pair of writings, *What is Metaphysics?* and *On the Essence of Ground*. In the first of these, the more famous of the two, the topic is the nothingness of the world as a whole, as experienced in *Angst*. But the nothingness of *Angst* exposes the "is" of that which remains—exposes why there is something rather than nothing. In other words, this

lecture describes the sheer unity of the “is,” though here he is concerned with the world as a whole rather than the unity of specific objects as in 1919. The second piece, *On the Essence of Ground*, concerns the particular character of every object, its specific reality. In a later preface to this work from 1949, Heidegger says that the “nihilitating not of nothingness and the not of being and beings [the respective topics of these two essays] are not indeed identical, but are the same, insofar as the being of beings reveals its essence.” And the primary way in which the being of beings reveals its essence, in 1949, is through *das Geviert* or fourfold, which can be summarized here quite briefly, since the quadrants of the world follow directly from the two principles already identified. Earth and sky, gods and mortals, have less to do with Hölderlin’s influence than with Husserl’s, and it is possibly even with Husserl’s assistance that we can *improve* Heidegger’s fourfold, which demands not only criticism, but also *competition* from an alternative brand of the fourfold.

All descriptions of earth show it to be both concealed and unified. It shelters, harbors, nourishes, protects. The earth is also never described as anything but one: Heidegger never tells us that the earth is trees, flowers, bushes, berries, streams, and caverns, along the lines of his picturesque descriptions of sky. The earth is an inscrutable withdrawn force that sustains the visible realm, and the earth is a mighty unified power.

Earth is always paired with sky, and sky is the opposite in both respects: it appears openly in the clearing, and it is made of many parts. Sky is the cycling of the seasons, the motion of the stars. The sky is a plurality.

A similar tension occurs along the axis between gods and mortals. The gods withdraw and only hint, and therefore belong to the same concealed realm as earth. But unlike earth, they are many: the fact that Heidegger speaks of gods in the plural has nothing to do with neo-pagan tendencies, and everything to do with the innate plurality of anything’s essence, which glitters with numerous qualities. The gods represent the concealed plurality of the thing in its autonomous underground energy.

Finally, we come to the term “mortals.” The key for Heidegger’s descriptions is that mortals are the ones who are capable of death “as” death. This reference to the as-structure shows that we are present in the clearing



once more, that transcendence has occurred. The reference to death “as” death reminds us of *Angst*, and hence of being “as” being. Heidegger does not say here that only mortals are capable of seeing green “as” green or tasting salty “as” salty; his interest in the moment of mortals is geared toward being as a whole, which we have already analyzed as the very unity of a thing.

Then far from a free-wheeling episode of poetic self-indulgence, the fourfold actually has a rigorous and systematic character, if at times a boring one. Soon we should consider the reasons why the fourfold remains somewhat boring, as well as ways in which to make it less so. But before that, two additional brief remarks on the importance of *Geviert* in Heidegger’s thought. First, Heidegger’s philosophy of language is completely reducible to his theory of the fourfold, which he describes as the unified interplay of world and thing. Heidegger is not at all a participant in the so-called “linguistic turn” in philosophy. When he says that “language speaks,” he means that language is not language because it is spoken, but rather it is spoken because it is language. Language is not a transcendental condition of human access to the world, but rather the interplay of world and thing quite apart from human interference, just as the lecture “*Das Ding*” tells us about the jug—which is not a jug because it is produced, but rather is produced only because it is this jug. Heidegger’s *On the Way to Language* ought to be reentitled *On the Way to the Thing*. Second, the fourfold lies at the heart of his reading of Nietzsche, whose thought is organized into four central concepts unified by a fifth: will to power, eternal return, nihilism, and superman, as unified in the overriding fifth term of *Gerechtigkeit*. It is impossible to continue to ignore the fourfold, as Heidegger scholarship continues to do.

The strengths of the fourfold are attractive enough, if somewhat obscure. First, the fourfold brings individual objects back to the center of philosophy, which has happened only rarely since Leibniz. Second, the fourfold both concedes an independent reality of things while rooting them in an absence that can never be adequately represented—this means that the fourfold sidesteps all the problems of metaphysics as ontotheology or metaphysics of presence, while restoring the full glory of metaphysics as a speculative theory about the nature of reality itself, thereby connecting

Heidegger to a more classical tradition of philosophy. Third, the fourfold's use of two crossing axes adds a bit of tension and asymmetry to the world, providing an exploratory probe to understand the dynamism of the world. And on a related note, the fourfold speaks of things as a mirror-play, which means that its concept of objects is more sophisticated than any supposed lump of wood or atoms. Every tiniest object in the world becomes the site of a metaphysical crisis.

The weaknesses of the fourfold are equally clear, and can be listed as follows. First, Heidegger draws no sufficient link between the fourfold and the more lucid portions of his philosophy; with luck, this problem has been fixed in the preceding paragraphs. Second, his idea of the "mirror-play" is mostly a negative statement, designed merely to say that the four poles do not stand side-by-side in pristine isolation. As for how the mechanics of the mirroring function, he has little or nothing to tell us, though this is forgivable in a pioneer. Third, Heidegger seems to suggest, with no justification, that some objects mirror the fourfold and others do not. While certain privileged rustic peasant items such as wooden shoes or pottery are always used as examples of true things, styrofoam, pesticide, and nuclear warheads seem to be regarded as mere objects. But this is impossible, since the axes of the fourfold are so fundamental as to cover any entity whatsoever, however low Heidegger's opinion of some of them may be. Fourth, Heidegger often seems to be seduced by the *literal* meaning of the four poles of the four. This is most evident in the case of "mortals." In the reading I have given above, mortals really just refers to the fact that any thing that is present is something at all. And according to what was said earlier, inanimate objects can be present to each other no less than to human Dasein. This means that the moment of "mortals" would be found even in distant space when an asteroid slams into a cratered moon, with all human Dasein millions of light years from the scene. There is also evidence of this prejudice in the case of sky, since his examples all refer far too literally to planets, stars, and seasons. Furthermore, when referring to the moment of gods, Heidegger often speaks with a near-apocalyptic pathos that would be more appropriate when speaking of an actual deity rather than simply of the plurality of features in any object's essence. Fifth, Heidegger remains

trapped in a traditional two-world theory. The underground world of the being of objects always remains fixed where it is, and the presence-at-hand of things of perception and use always remains present-at-hand. There are only two places on the map, even if things seem able to move from one of these place to the other.

But as already suggested, the biggest problem with the fourfold is something quite different: namely, it is boring. It is boring because one of its axes of division is far too static. Here's what I mean. The simple Heideggerian dualism between shadow and light, sheltering and clearing, fuels the dreams of students even today. Every object of simple presence turns out to be an intricate haunted house, with specters and phantoms rising endlessly from the basement. One post-Heideggerian movement after another is sparked by this inscrutable and incomplete movement of entities between the depths of the earth and the sparkling light of the sky. The same cannot be said for the distinction between a thing's unity and its particularity. Here we seem to have a dry textbook distinction that can rarely if ever be put to use. And without a doubt, there seems to be no real ontological tension here, since a thing is always one and always remains one, and this oneness must stay one at all times, unified to an equal degree at all moments as long as the thing still exists. Here, the avant garde sex appeal of presence and absence is utterly lacking, and we seem to suffer under the driest subtleties of a schoolmaster.

To preserve the breakthroughs of Heideggerian philosophy, the only path worth following is the highway deeper into the heart of individual things. In my view, this route can lead only through the fourfold, the most underrated and also most poorly articulated of all of Heidegger's major concepts. To this end, I hold that four key improvements must be made to the fourfold—improvements which should be sufficient to allow for a true post-Heideggerian metaphysics, or speculative ontology about the world itself that can still survive Heidegger's own criticisms of the metaphysics of presence.

**First improvement:** instead of Heidegger's dualistic cosmos of presence and absence, we must adopt a metaphysics of the levels of the world. True enough, Heidegger's hammer can pass from concealed and executant to broken and visible. But the object in question is still moving back and forth between just two layers of reality. This model of the world can no longer be maintained, for a simple reason. It turned out earlier that the difference

between an object and its presence was equivalent to that between an object and its relations. After all, for a thing to be present means that it registers its presence on the environment in some way, to be visible, conceptualized, or causally significant for some other thing, even while the object in question is never fully exhausted by all of its relations. But herein lies the problem. The being of the bicycle, screwdriver or napalm thrower is indeed a surplus of reality beyond any of the relations these objects fall into it. However, even if we call this being a substance, it has a relational structure. Simply put, in common-sense terms, objects are made of pieces, and their essences also have numerous separate components. The only way to escape saying that objects are relational is, as Leibniz saw, to say that they are simple. And we cannot say with Leibniz that they are simple, because this would make them ultimate present-at-hand atoms, with no reality withdrawing behind their simple pointlike quality. Just as importantly, a relation is not just relational, since it is also a substance. For example, I perceive a mailbox or a table, and begin a phenomenological description of this perception, unpacking numerous layers of the experience that were not consciously evident to me at first. The reason such a description is possible is because my relation to the mailbox or table has a genuine *reality*, one never fully exhausted by any description of it. In this way, substances turn out to be relations, and relations turn out to be substantial. What we are left with is not a cosmos in which shadow and light form two sides of the moon, with vehicles driving back and forth from obscurity into transparency and back again. Instead, we have a world made up of objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects, descending and ascending into each other infinitely. It is not just that every object can be viewed as either present-at-hand or ready-to-hand. Rather, reality is made up of countless levels, each of them *simultaneously* a concealed underground space in comparison with the relations into which it enters, and a shimmering surface-effect in comparison to its components. The world is utterly jam-packed full with objects, devoid of nothingness, with one object loaded into its neighbor like a toy mongoose jumping from a prank cookie jar, or a stick of dynamite set to explode after contact with the air. This gives us the levels of the world. As far as I am aware, the only theorist of the levels of the world, until recently, was John Locke. Against Leibniz, Locke

restores the rights of substance to such complicated aggregates as armies, pairs of diamonds, human bodies, machines, and other motley assortments of elements. Unfortunately, Locke pays a heavy price for this by not granting much independent reality to the things themselves—ideas come to dominate over entities, as reversed in the heresy of Locke’s self-proclaimed disciple Whitehead. In more recent philosophy, there are at least two theories of the levels of the world. One is found in Bruno Latour’s 1999 book *Pandora’s Hope*, which describes the way in which objects are simultaneously substance and composite, intertwined endlessly. Another is found in *The Imperative* by Alphonso Lingis, working in a more phenomenological idiom than Latour. In this book, Lingis does not describe phenomenology as a way of bringing something from the horizon of obscurity to the clearing of lucid brightness. Instead, consciousness is described as an exploration that moves up and down between the countless levels of the world, like a submarine or zeppelin of philosophy. Human consciousness is no longer a realm that fills half of a two-layered reality, but always occupies one of trillions of different levels in reality, following one object into its depths, only to find depths beneath depths and heights above depths.

**Second Improvement:** Heidegger’s philosophy needs to be forced, under interrogation, to make specific metaphysical claims. One such claim is already necessary, though it has traditionally been horrifying to philosophers: namely, we need to embrace the dreaded infinite regress. Heidegger’s critique of presence-at-hand requires us to do this; or more exactly, the levels of the world require us to do this. Behind the visible or tactile hammer, we have the being of the hammer. But we saw that this being is not simple, but rather a relational compound in its own right. And behind any relation lies its independent terms, spiralling downward, deeper and deeper into depths that are never reached. For suppose that we reached an ultimate term of sheer presence, whether the simplicity of a monad, an atom, or anything else of this kind. There is no such thing as sheer presence: the presence of a thing is the way it registers some reality in its environment, enters into some sort of relation with its neighbors. And this is already not the object itself, but merely a caricature or relational effect of the object on its surroundings. Behind this, there always a deeper reality of the object. In other words, the Heideggerian-Derridean critique of presence

has to be transformed into a blunt metaphysical assertion that the layers of the world never come to a close. Whether there is also an infinite *progress*, with ever larger universes containing the whichever largest one we find, is a question to be left for another time. But note that nothing in the history of science contradicts the infinite regress into ever tinier entities and ever larger world; if anything, these infinite chains of reality have become quite fashionable among scientists recently. But not only is the infinite regress itself important. Of equal importance is the notion that from Heidegger's rather agnostic brand of cosmology, we might tease out dozens of metaphysical assertions, and thereby change the entire cautious, critical, aloof, noncommittal style of post-Heideggerian philosophy, or rather post-Kantian philosophy. Room can be made in philosophy once again for wildcat speculators and high-rolling intellectual gamblers.

**Third improvement:** we need to develop some form of indirect causation. Heidegger's philosophy is widely known to be one in which the being of objects withdraws from human Dasein. If pushed to its logical conclusions, it is also a philosophy in which inanimate objects withdraw from each other. Yet causation somehow occurs anyway. But how? It cannot be a direct form of causation, since one object does not touch another. The classical solution to this dilemma was known as occasionalism. There were the Medieval Ash'arites of southern Iraq, for whom God's power was too overwhelming to allow any causal power at all to fire and water. There were the modern Europeans, for whom mind and extension are too different ever to come into contact. And there are more recent figures, for whom objects are merely surface-effects with no causal power, and hence must be linked by a rumbling undercurrent that links them all. In the case of Heidegger, we have autonomous objects that forever slip away into the night, untouchable, yet somehow inflicting blows and forces on each other nonetheless. Indirect cause is mandatory, since direct cause is impossible, and the outright *lack* of cause unsustainable for various reasons. We must reject occasional causation, not for its theological content, but for its laziness. It provides no explanation of the mechanisms by which God would intervene at every instant. What we seek is a mysterious mechanism "X," which I will call "vicarious causation" instead of occasional causation.

Objects affect one another by means of a vicarious cause, still unknown.

**Fourth improvement:** Heidegger's own second axis must be scrapped, since the tension between the unity and multifaceted quality of a thing is too lacking in dynamic tension to set the cosmos in motion. But there is a better second axis, also found in Husserl: the distinction between an intentional object and its various specific profiles or adumbrations. Circling a tower or gloomy limestone cliff at various angles and distances, I am never tempted to think that the object itself changes at each instant. Instead, the object is always present to me as something more specific than it really is, more wrapped up in the heat of the moment, encrusted with an excess of diamonds, gold, or period costume. No one view of the tower gives me the essence of the tower; I always view it in a highly specific mood, at dawn or dusk, at a certain ambient air temperature, and none of these have anything to do with the tower, since all are completely dispensable. And yet we can never dispense with all of them; a pure ecstatic vision of the towerhood of the tower, apart from its accidental robes and masks of the moment, is never possible. What we have, then, is a duel between objects and the accidental features encrusted on their perceptible surfaces. Yet this tower of my experience is also not a real tower, since it has no causal power to inflict blows on the world, and if I am deluded may not even really exist. The tower as a sensual object is not reducible to its specific qualities, but also not the same thing as the real tower. This is the real second axis or second dualism in the world, as opposed to some more abstract distinction between unity and particularity. We can now rephrase the structure of the fourfold in a new and somewhat perverse way. On the one hand there is the tension between an object and its parts, since my interaction with the hammer fails to exhaust the being of either me or the hammer, just as the hammer fails to exhaust the rumbling subterranean reality of its handle and head. On the other hand there is the tension between an object and its specific qualities, whether essential or accidental, since the object has no need of its accidents and cannot simply be pieced together out of its qualities. The tension between these two divisions, which are the same without being identical, is the engine of the world, and the permanent subject of any object-oriented philosophy. For now, simply note the following strange inversion. The hammer in its withdrawal is always *more*

than any of the relations in which it becomes involved, always richer than one realizes. But the hammer as a sensual object is always *less* than its accidental profiles would have us believe, since it is far poorer or less detailed than the specific color or angle or mood or temperature or environment in which it appears.

The situation is now as follows. We have a metaphysics in which objects withdraw from human theory and praxis, but also from each other. Instead of having one kingdom of shadow and another of sunlight, we have nothing but a massive, endless system of objects in which each object is a specific level of the world, acting as an autonomous black box in comparison to the relations into which it enters, but acting as a system of relations in comparison to its own inscrutable components. The regress of objects proceeds infinitely. Objects do not touch one another directly, but do touch by means of some vicarious medium. And just as objects withdraw into darkness from one another, within the sphere of appearance there is a second dualism, in which the object of perception is distinguished from its swirling superficial costumes.

The key to this entire system of philosophy is the problem of vicarious causation. Painfully difficult though the subject is, we need to close with a few words about this topic, and about the implications for metaphysics that flow directly from it.

### **Vicarious Causation**

We were thrown into an infinite ascent and descent of the levels of the world, since no object is a simple. All are composite, and in two distinct senses. First, the hammer is made of actual parts, actual physically distinct objects on whose existence it depends. Second, the hammer does not fully deploy these parts, but only siphons from them a limited range of what we might call qualities or properties, but which I follow Zubiri in terming *notes* after the Scholastic *notae*, which is roughly equivalent to what is now known in analytic philosophy as *tropes*. These are not free-floating qualities that happen to inhere in one substrate or another, but rather characteristics that exist only in their contact with the objects in question. They are not pristine, pure qualities unaffected by what they inhere in, as if the green of money, candy, marijuana leaves, and the cadavers of the seasick were all green in the same way. In some way, they must be bent or shaped by the



gravity of the object to which they belong.

In any case, the levels of the world entails that all objects are hard black boxes from the outside, while on the inside they are filled with a kind of molten plasma of interior relations. But by the same token, all genuine relations are objects. After all, we have eliminated some of the usual criteria for objecthood, such as hard physical carapaces or durability in terms of the calendar. What makes an object now is simply that a thing has real internal quality that is never fully exhausted by any of the relations in which it becomes involved. This can easily be seen in the sort of relation known as perception. My perception of a grain silo or strip mine is clearly an object in its own right, since it is open to endless phenomenological description, none of it ever adequate to the full reality of this experience. To form a relation is to create an independent power in the cosmos, to release a ghost from a cage and let it walk the roads of the earth, where it can never fully be grasped.

Consider the full title of intentionality: intentional inexistence. This is usually taken to mean that objects of perception have the curious property of existing inside of consciousness. In fact, the opposite is true: *instead of objects existing inside of consciousness, consciousness exists on the inside of an object*. My perception of a far-off mountain is a distinct object capable of infinite exploration or infinite possible effects on other entities. In this respect we are always unified within a larger entity, and our side-by-side coexistence, which can always transform into new sorts of experiences and hence new objects, is a sort of contiguity on the interior of an object, on its molten inner core.

Hence the image of the volcanic structure of objects. From the outside, an entity is an ominous cone-shaped, block-shaped, or spherical unit, brooding and serene—untouched, entirely unaltered, even entirely unseen by any of the relations in which it becomes involved. On the interior, however, it is a swirling turmoil of molten lava and half-smelted boulders, crystals, and ore. The interior of a hammer or apple is volcanic in this way—the object lies dormant insofar as its parts or notes remain content with a specific settlement, stably encountering each other in one specific and limited way, even while each harbors secret fires or armaments to unleash on the others as soon as the situation begins to change. As Dan Selcer nicely

puts it, there is a reversal of Leibniz: objects are real not if they are simple, but if and only if they are an interior aggregate made of notes stripped from the object's parts like engines and windshields from a junkyard. But returning to the dominant metaphor, to inhabit a level of the world is to inhabit the interior of a volcanic object; it is to bathe in the central crater of Santorini or Krakatoa, Mt. St. Helens, or even the volcanic crater of a screwdriver or Volkswagen. While each level of the world is filled with danger and instability, it is also a private vacuum-sealed reality that nothing else can enter. An object *is* this dangerous inner life, but no access can be gained to this life without upsetting and destabilizing it. The question of vicarious causation, of how objects link to one another, may seem to some observers like an opaque question. But it can be viewed metaphorically as the question of how to build pipeliness, canals, elevator shafts, tunnels, or other corridors between one volcanic crater and another, to allow for an exchange of energies. After all, this does indeed happen: the world is not made up of isolated vacuums frozen forever in lonely retreat. Instead, events occur. One thing does affect another. The molten status quo on the interior of an object leads eventually to an eruption, a transition of molten materials from one place to another. One object spews forth its contents onto its neighbors, and a new landscape hardens, made of obsidian and ash, perhaps forming a volcanic core of its own. But all of this remains sheer literary experiment without a quick return to more technical language.

And what could be more dry and technical than the fourfold, at least at first glance? To repeat it as simply as possible, Heidegger's fourfold means something like this: There is the jackhammer in its silent underground reality, which is specifically a jackhammer rather than a trireme, a wall, or a man, and also the jackhammer as a caricature encountered by other realities, in which respect it also specifically a jackhammer rather than a trireme, a wall, or a man. My claim was that the second axis of division is too boring compared to the first, and too lacking in dynamic tension, since the opposition between unity and particularity or existence and essence remains forever fixed in the thing.

A more interesting version of the fourfold is as follows. There are two different relations, the same but not identical, and in fearful tension with

one another. The thing is at war with its own parts, and simultaneously there is a war between its own notes, which might also be called qualities or properties, given a few preliminary warnings. This can be expressed differently, in more tangible terms. On the one hand we have a real package bomb, withdrawn from any perception, cognition, or use of it. But when this bomb is considered in relation to other entities, it is already a component in new objects that incorporate all of the terms of the relation. The bomb itself is always more than its effects. To reach it is something that no human and no other entity can do, unless those entities are the parts of the bomb itself, which nestle up against one another on the interior of that entity, and not in a purely physical sense. Rather, the gunpowder, fuse, and detonator all meet one another not as autonomous entities of bottomless depth, but as caricatures purely exploiting one another to achieve a specific result, reducing each other to masks and other facades. We have seen that there is no direct relation between an object and its parts, to such an extent that they must interact vicariously. An object is one level of the world, and each of its parts is another. To explore different levels of the universe of a human is to create new objects while simultaneously burrowing into their molten core, so that we always inhabit the interior of our relation with a bicycle, crystal ball, mammal, or moon. But no gradations are possible here. An object either inhabits a certain level of the world or it does not; the relation either exists or fails to exist. The relation between an object and its parts has a binary character, one that either occurs or does not occur, and no object is in two places at one. In this sense, the world is utterly quantized, broken up into cleanly hewn chunks. Let's give the name "space" to this set of interlocking relations between objects and their components and the components of the components, on down to infinity and perhaps upward to infinity as well. In this sense, space turns out not to be a continuum at all, but rather a set of interlocking yet mutually isolated vacuums or bubbles, each impenetrable to the other. While Whitehead denounces any idea of objects unrelated to anything else as "vacuous actuality," vacuous actuality is precisely what objects are, since they withdraw into the vacuum of their own private being, unruffled by the vibrations and outright assaults of their neighbors. This can also be rephrased as the distinction between substance and relation.

A different tension, or rather the same but not identical tension, can be

found *within* any given level of the world. The objects of perception remain identical despite all surface variations. When examining a brick wall, we can sit before it at different times of day, through all manner of violent mood-swings, while irradiating it with numerous different colors and intensities of light, even while circling it from various angles, viewing it from above by helicopter, or from beneath while lying supine at its base. The tension here is between the wall as an object of perception and all the specific concrete manifestations in which it must appear to us. As stated earlier, if the real object is always more than its relations, the sensual object is always less than its full range of accidents. All of the sensual objects inhabiting any level of the universe, the interior of any thing, blend into one another, confuse their facades and contours with one another, borrow or steal qualities from each other that do not belong to them, as when a warehouse, orchard, or cotton farm, steals the rays of the sun to appear more brilliant than it is in its own right. This tension between a sensual or intentional object and its unavoidable particular surface contours is the same thing as what we have called the strife between a thing and its notes. Why? Because the thing claims to the outside world to be a withdrawn unity, unarticulated, raw, and pure. But on the inside, it is a smoldering volcanic core in which its parts, now caricatured as individual qualities or notes, exist in side by side relation threatening to detonate one another if their relations should change. A quick example is in order. Wandering through a forest on Halloween night, I encounter a clearing filled with fifty hanged corpses, and am paralyzed with horror. These corpses swing back and forth in the breeze, and the movement of the clouds changes the degree of moonlight bathing them at each instant, none of these surface alterations rescuing me from this grisly scene of devastation and dread. Suddenly, the hanged corpses begin to laugh and to jeer, chilling my blood. But just an instant more, and the corpses call out in greeting: for these are my fraternity brothers, and it was all an elaborate prank designed done by these close companions and drinking buddies to horrify me. In this scenario, each of the objects that were present had disguised themselves by borrowing misleading features: the slow, morbid swing of live bodies suspended from bungee cords. Shift this deliberate accident into the normal body language of live students, shift

their affected silence into teasing mockery, and the objects in this scenario (all of them, remember, residing on the interior of a larger object, or relation between me and them) unleash previously concealed features in these objects and change the situation entirely, or move everything to a different level of the world or different space. But when merely speaking of the slow oscillation of moonlight over the supposed corpses or languid pendular swing of the torsoes, we can speak of time rather than of space. Here we do have a continuum. All possible accidental gradations of moonlight can be brought into play in this scene without changing the underlying character of the intentional or sensual objects. The strife between an object and its own internal notes can be redefined as time.

The combat between a thing and its parts and the thing and its internal notes has been reformulated, then, as the intersecting axes of noncommunicating independent spaces, each of them a theater where the forward and backward oscillations of time unfold. There is neither one objective space, nor is space a mere nickname for the relations between things, since space is precisely that which *resists* all relations. Every object defines a space, and with an infinity of objects in infinite regress there are an infinity of autonomous spaces, an empire of bubbles rising and falling through the world. And the interior of every object defines a time, so that there are infinite times, and neither one objective time nor a set of relations of succession between different events that would deserve this name.

What is still missing from this picture is any account of how one space communicated with one another—this is the vicarious cause we have been seeking. While the exact mechanics of this procedure are elusive and deserve full development elsewhere, I can end with one additional suggestion of how to reach the vicarious cause. What is needed is some way for objects to come into contact even while not coming into contact. This can be seen most clearly in a general phenomenon that could be called “allure,” which takes countless forms. I will define as allure any case in which a thing becomes present in the very moment that it is split from its own features. The phenomenon of style is one clear example. We do not encounter artists, musicians, friends, or philosophers as a sum total of events or effects generated by them. A style is something that exceeds any of its products, since we can easily perform thought-experiments to try to imagine

friends in unforeseen situations, or to ask what Picasso's symphonies might sound like. Such experiments may be hard to verify, but are never nonsensical, and are often seized upon enthusiastically by my dinner companions as soon as they are mentioned.

Metaphor may be an even better case, and I am largely persuaded here by the forgotten theory of Ortega y Gasset. Like Heidegger in the tool-analysis, Ortega draws a distinction between a cypress or flame in their subterranean executant reality, and the cypress or flame as pale simulacra encountered in everyday language. In Ortega's account, metaphor is important because it bridges the gap between the two levels of a thing's being, by *simulating* the direct presence of the *underground reality* of the thing. To say "the cypress is a flame" is to do several things at once: it posits the cypress as a withdrawn underground unity apart from the tangible qualities by which it is known. Second, it strips the qualities of the flame away from the flame and pushes them into the orbit of the cypress, like moons stolen from Jupiter by a more dominant planet. By splitting the subterranean cypress from the cypress of the senses, it connects us to a deeper level by drawing our attention to it; by rebending the sensual notes of the flame with the gravity of the underground cypress, it also seems to bring that dark, occluded cypress power back into the world of the senses by letting it steal the outer costume of the flame. Ortega notes further that metaphors work best when dealing with *accidental* qualities of the things: "my pen is like a pencil" is one of the least compelling of similes, as is "Chicago is like Toronto." Somehow, the vicarious path between one object and another, one level of the world and another, must pass through the sensual qualities of any one level. These swirling, molten features on the interior of a thing are not just trapped at one level of the world forever, but by resonating with one another, summon up depths below depths. What if causation were also a kind of allure, one with which inanimate objects cajoled and seduced one another into entering into union or smashing each other to pieces? And what if the accidents of a thing were the windows of every monad? While these questions may seem a long way from Heidegger, they strike me as the ultimate results of his enterprise.

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# PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF POLITICAL WORLD

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## Fetishism and the Converted World of its Forms

Haralambi Panicedis

*Under arches of thorns  
Oh, brother, we little arrows crawl*  
- Georges Trackl

*But happiness is fragile, and when it is  
not threatened by people or  
circumstances it is surrounded by  
specters*  
- Marguerite Yourcenar

Grammar is the best thing in this world. It is able to give every sentence its meaning according to rules. Today, the new rule, the magic word in the bosom of media grammar, theory, publicity, everyday life, etc., is globalization. It is used to praise the New World, which is still to come, and also this world where we already live.

The waft of the future is already palpable. The media drive our ears deaf by repetitious news and take over all the other senses with images of those who rule the globalization process. September 11, mad cow disease, the discovery of the human genome, pollution of the environment,

prostitution on the Internet, prostitution beyond the net, etc. Globalization has been depicted according to the genre belonging mostly to the descriptions of journeys or to the sweet talk of fairytales for children and adults around the family fireplace. There are almost all kinds of statistics available, and facts seriously thought about - more than none. But you can find so many fairytales, so many that they start looking as the advent of the transcendental idea of 'general', i.e., to turn themselves completely into the incontestable conviction of what's possible, into 'the best of the all possible worlds', a recipe with a thousand year history.

Virtual globalization, informational globalization, political globalization, democratic globalization, economic globalization, etc. Everything is in a process of globalization. It takes the shape of an enormous container ruled by money and fed with money. Globalizing institutions see themselves as a senseless movement of human beings reduced to atoms, as a converted negative reflection of this same reality in which we live. Is there any other way to turn everything and everyone into a huge container of 'signs' without direction, without holding back into a system of values or norms?

This is a mill for humans. Although most people do not have any clear idea about the meaning of the word globalization they can already feel its consequences. But globalization is still not a sense of destiny hanging over us. The serious problem is that this term does not express any understanding, it does not explain anything, it only describes some part of what the entire phenomenon of modernity could mean.

This is my reason for thinking that this word is rather the key-term of a new ideology, of a new, all-embracing totalitarian ideology, which is not trying to seduce, but which directly corrupts by manipulating behavior in order to impose a new type of control and a new type of submission. Globalization is a symbol convenient for the new repression humankind ought not to allow be imposed on itself. Is not it already time to resist this self-organizing 'progress' running already for several centuries at the expense of everything human? The first signs are already there that the modern human society is trying to wake us through specific individual attempts for resistance against the status quo; I would very much like to say



- to stop its self-devastation.

But everyday fetishism makes us somehow even more docile and more silent than animals. Big and small theoreticians of the state of things prefer to even hide their consciences in resignation and consent with the status quo. They invent instant theories about what their perceived sense of in-depth knowledge can access. For in this extreme case, they want to live now making the most of their opportunities. The texts they write can be seen as proof of their being capable and willing to live only now. Let's ask a rhetorical question: What have their words done to change the world? They have only changed words about this world.

The phenomenology of the course of development of the modern world suppresses not only ordinary people but also the theoreticians of this world. It suppresses not only those who make observations but also those who try to analyze, explain, and predict. This leads us back to a problem which is curiously left out of the debates on globalization - the problem of social forms, and more specifically about the ontology of the fetishism of commodities whose domination over social relations keeps on growing through new forms of total economic and political control.

This is a control over individuals through the centralization and globalization of power resources. It occurs also through supplying these processes with excessive ideological content. So, the fetishism of commodities seems to have finalized or accomplished the entire circle of social conversion exactly in the context of the modern market system: starting from the transformation of social ontology and ending with the transformation of social consciousness, including its theoretical forms. These include, in the most cases, theoretical forms of apology for this world. As paradoxical as it could sound, apology is the common point of view of almost the entire field of contemporary humanities, not to mention the tragicomic grimaces and swinging of political rhetoric where the ideas about a progressive left or conservative right have long lost any force.

Contemporary society, or at least the dominant form of existing society, is a developed market system and historical system. Nowadays, the enterprise to make an entire analysis of the possibilities for change of contemporary market society, to make explicit its historical character, i.e., the unveiling of its historical horizons, looks more than ever utopian and

even senseless.

I shall anyway take the liberty of touching one of globalization's characteristic features, which Marx has brilliantly analyzed in *Capital*: I have in mind the historical character of the fetishism of commodities and of its incarnation into the structure of bourgeois society. The theory Marx developed in *Capital* not only gives a new approach to the analysis of society but it also fulfills a new understanding of the nature of knowledge itself. Marx's method of historical analysis is the embodiment of philosophy into a system of scientific categories. The dialectic synthesis, which is characteristic of Marx, is still the main obstacle to understanding the theoretical content of *Capital*. The difficulty comes for economists on the side of the philosophical language, and from the shift between philosophic and economic discourse. Marx's study has an orientation towards many problems giving an extensive shape to its contextual field: from the specificity of the economic definitions of human activity, through the functional particularities and the play of social roles and masks, to the possible perspectives on social initiative or on the character and subject of social changes.

In his *Manifesto*, Marx specifically emphasizes that the limits to the social horizon of bourgeois society coincide with its world-wide domination and that it is related more or less to continuous and specific revolutions, which speed and change its development. To the extent to which capitalist society manages to regulate effectively its own inbuilt contradictions, its existence does not seem ultimately threatened. Even more, most of its specific contradictions can still be exported to places where its domination still does not have a total character. What is important is the need for contemporary society to be analyzed as a whole. This analysis would be of an adequate character if Marx's methodology from *Capital* is used. I say adequate, because I include in this notion not only the scientific but also the practical value of the results of such a theoretical effort.

This text touches upon two groups of problems, which are characteristically shaped in Marx's theory and are directly related to the elaboration of specific content; aspects not only of the concept of fetishism but most of all of the fetishism of commodities as a social phenomenon

characteristic for a particular social formation. The first group includes the unveiling of the specific ontology of capitalist society and the way its essential form-building relations acquire a converted fetish character in the direct everyday forms of communication and social interaction. The second group outlines the way these specifically historical relations are interpreted by theoreticians.

Marx's analysis itself has shown that philosophical concepts applied to different social practices acquire specific interpretational characteristics and their abstract-theoretical understanding may contain problems. The dynamism of contemporary society's evolution is revealed clearly enough even in the sphere of some of its fundamental contradictions: ecologic crisis due to industrial growth, totally aggressive repression as a consequence of the freedom of consumption, further enlargement of the gap between rich and poor, almost uncontrollable use of scientific achievements, irrational behavior of the financial markets, etc. These are contradictions already affecting humanity and implying a transformation of basic social relations. The first chapter of *Capital*, 'Commodities', begins with the following claim: 'The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities; its unit of measure being the single commodity. Our study must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity.'<sup>\*</sup>

In the section titled 'The Fetishism of Commodities and its Secret Thereof' we are introduced to the essence of the problem from its very beginning. 'A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a use value, there is nothing mysterious about it no matter whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human needs, or from the point that those properties are product of human labor. It is clear that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature in such a way as to make them useful to

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<sup>\*</sup> Quotations in this essay are taken from the text of Marx's *Capital*, Volume 1 as reproduced at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4>.

him ... But as soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something sensible-supersensible. The mystical character of commodities does not originate, therefore, in their use value ... Whence, then, does the enigmatical character of the product of labor arises so soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Evidently, from this form itself.'

If we have to introduce philosophical concepts to summarize Marx's statements, it is here that a specific dialectic of general and particular becomes apparent for the historical development of society. The essence of capitalist society is unveiled in the fundamental ontology of production of goods (i.e., in the specific appropriation and redistribution of surplus labor). In the functional sense, e.g., regarding the formation of social relations, this ontology determines the content of the real social life playing a role at different levels of the social structure including its theoretical comprehension. The reality is what it is; it has already been accomplished; its parameters have already been given, but it does not mean in any way that people are deprived of subjective characteristics. On the contrary, they have been given the possibility to act freely exactly in the sphere of this formal freedom where the personal independence is based on material dependence. I shall continue with Marx: 'Uniformity of all sorts of human labor is expressed materially by their products all being ultimately values; the measure of the expenditure of labor power by the means of duration of that expenditure, takes the form of the quantity of value of the products of labor; and finally, the mutual relations of the producers within which the social character of their labor affirms itself, take the form of a social relation among the labor products.' The way people work for each other and build the social form of capitalist society is expressed in the form of commodities which the products of their labor acquire. 'A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing simply because in it the social character of human labor appears as a material character stamped upon the product of that labor - as social material features of these products. That is why the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not among themselves, but among the products of their labor. By this quid pro quo (appearance of something instead of something else) the products of labor become commodities, social things, sensible-supersensible ... There, the existence of the things qua commodities, and the value relation among the

products of labor, which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising there from. This is just a certain social relation among people themselves that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.'

The interpretational scope of the concepts 'social ontology' and 'social reality' is accentuated through the concepts of 'objective content' and 'social form'. Marx continues: 'In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world, the creatures of human brain appear as independent beings, endowed with life, entering into relation both with one another and with the human race. So, it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call fetishism, which attaches itself to the products of labor, as soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. This fetishism of commodities has its origin ... in the peculiar social character of the labor that produces them.'

Marx not only characterizes the basic aspects of market fetishism as *differentia specifica* of capitalist society, but he also tracks the way of its foundation as well as the way of its reception in different fields of the social consciousness of this same society. The analysis of economic phenomena unveils their importance and their meaning in the context of the entire system of social relations. The analysis of the base implicates the conclusions about the superstructure; the analysis of the social being grows into an analysis of the social consciousness:

'As a general rule, items of utility become commodities, only because they are products of private sorts of labor that do not depend on each other. The sum total of these private sorts of labor forms the aggregate labor of society. Since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's private labor does not show itself except in the act of exchange. In other words, the private sorts of labor assert themselves as a part of the labor of society only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labor of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between

persons and social relations between things.’

Within this entire vertical resection of the social structure of capitalist society Marx resumes the specificity of ontology of specific-historically forming relations among people and the specific way these relations are represented in a converted way or represent themselves on the surface of social interaction.

The inner, essential process is unveiled which makes possible the emergence, the production, and the reproduction of such reality. The ‘real reality’ is a seeming of the conditions and processes through which the common activity of people is being fulfilled. Marx’s fundamental conclusion consists in the character which is given to capitalist society as the first and the only society in human history, the ontological particularity of which is the material relation determining the type and peculiarity of social dependence - relations of personal independence based on objective dependence. The accent on the issue of man in twentieth-century philosophy is not accidental. It is the expression of this double tendency in the development of capitalism. The striving for a full and free realization of the person is related to the universalization of making material the social relations manifesting themselves as domination of contingency over individuals. It is not only about the ontology of production and reproduction directly but also about the entire social life related to a certain historical stage in the development of human civilization.

The real domination of abstraction is a fundamental character of this converted reality. The feeling comes from the assumption of imagined forms of destiny and of destination, so closely related and, sometimes, are even identical with the possession or lack of money. Marx makes the process explicit of fulfillment of the sheer domination of the abstraction as a sheer system-forming relation of capitalist society in the following way:

‘It is only by being exchanged that the products of labor acquire, as values, one uniform social value objectivity, distinct from their sensibly different forms of use values. This division of a product into a useful thing and a value becomes practically important only when exchange has acquired such an extension that useful items are produced for the purpose of being exchanged, and their character as values has therefore to be taken into account, beforehand, still during production.’

The subject-object relations from subject to object in a specific society are unveiled and determined on this large panorama picture starting from the foggy ritual in which and through which the objectification of essential human force is realized as materialization and alienation in the sphere of basic relations, thus ensuring the production and the reproduction of human life up to the magic influence it has on the forms in which it is thought about on different levels of social consciousness.

Abstracting and abstraction turn out to be not only a logical and epistemological process but also an objective social process frozen in objective social forms. In this specific case abstraction is the objective process of the domination of objective relations as an expression of the one-sided and deepest essence of capitalist society: it is an objective connection which abstract (namely because of being one-sided) but real domination hides the social character of the relations. That is why 'when we bring the products of our labor into relation with each other as values, it is not because we see in these items only the material receptacles of homogeneous human labor. Quite the contrary: whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labor, the different kinds of labor expended upon them. We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it.' In other words, people are not conscious about basic social relations which create the specificity of their social bond, but namely through their own activity in practice they produce and reproduce this relation :

'Value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, we try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of our own social products; for to stamp an object of use as a value is just as much a social product as language. The recent scientific discovery that the products of labor, so far as they are values, are but material expressions of the human labor spent in their production, marks, indeed, an epoch in the history of the development of the human race, but, by no means, dissipates the mist through which the social character of labor seems to us to be a material characteristic of the products themselves. The fact, that in the particular form of production with which we are dealing, viz., the production of commodities, the specific social character of private labor carried on independently consists in the equality

of every kind of that labor, by virtue of its being human labor, which character, therefore, assumes in the product the form of value. This fact appears to the producers, notwithstanding the discovery above referred to, to be just as real and final as the fact that, after the discovery by science of the component gases of air, the atmosphere itself remained unaltered.'

In such conditions the everyday consciousness and the direct practical activity of people are linked together and mutually conditioned. On the other hand, the theoretical explication and understanding of the process of materialization of the social relations, i.e., the theoretical sublation of seeming represented in reality cannot change this reality. Even more, this material seeming of the social character of labor which has taken the form of objective reality is admitted as well by theoreticians - daily consciousness as a natural law, i.e., non-historically. this is so because in the context of everyday life 'what, first of all, practically concerns people when they make an exchange, is the question, how much of some other product they get for their own and in what proportions the products are exchangeable? When these proportions have, by custom, attained a certain stability, they appear to result from the nature of the products, so that, for instance, one ton of iron and two ounces of gold appear as naturally to be of equal value as a pound of gold and a pound of iron, in spite of their different physical and chemical qualities, are of equal weight. The character of having value, when once impressed upon products, obtains fixity only by reason of their acting and re-acting upon each other as quantities of value. These quantities vary continually, independently of the will, foresight and action of the producers. To them, their own social activity takes the form of an activity of objects which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them.' Marx establishes here clearly enough how the realization of one of the basic economic relations in the field of exchange is intermittent and transforms the entire social structure of capitalist society. What is realized through this social movement?

'It requires a fully developed production of commodities until, from accumulated experience alone, a scientific conviction springs up that all different kinds of private labor, which are carried out independently of each other, and yet as spontaneously developed branches of the social division of labor, are continually being reduced, in



certain proportions, to their social measure. And why? Because, in the midst of all the accidental and ever fluctuating exchange relations between the products, the labor time socially necessary for their production forcibly asserts itself like an over-riding law of nature; the law of gravity thus asserts itself when a house falls about our ears. The determination of the magnitude of value by labor time is therefore a secret, hidden under the apparent fluctuations in the relative values of commodities. Its discovery, while removing the seeming of mere contingency from the determination of the magnitude of the values of products, yet in no way it removes the material form the magnitude of the value.'

It is precisely in the market form of the products of labor where the roots of mysticism in the market world are hidden, representing a complicated system of layers of real social processes, objective illusions, and the fetishist consciousness. It corresponds to converted forms of human life which is not a system of contingent confusions but are born by the very character of dominant economic relations. Although scientific analysis cannot remove this phenomenon, it still opens up the possibility for a critical attitude towards reality, and this could be made as the basis for a critical, active position.

The determining point in historical development for Marx is the direct production and reproduction of human life. Its essential characteristic is the objectification and realization of the human being as self-assertion in the world. Unlike previous social formations, capitalist relations dominate; this is influenced by not only transformation through the process of materialization but also by the appearance and configuration of the entire structure and dynamism of social development. This theoretical position of Marx has acquired its methodological resection in the very text of *Capital*. The research method (Marx's study lasted more than 20 years) embraces the entire physiognomic and physiology of a society; it finds its corresponding way of exposure in which the radiance in the language of logic coincides with any unique piece of art. In the first volume of *Capital*, the capitalist processes of production are the object of research as a direct production process within the general philosophical and historical-theoretical framework that sets the limits and the specificity of the objective field.

The analysis of market fetishism is here linked in the first place with the unveiling of its genesis and its specific role in social relations. In the

second volume, the life path of capital and market fetishism are traced through the process of circulation as the mediator of the social process of reproduction, and it turns out that the capitalist process of production seen in the masses is the union of the processes of production and of reproduction. The task of the third volume is to find and describe the specific forms which emerge from the process of the circulation of capital. According to Marx, this gives the possibility to show how the appearances of capital come closer to that form in which they appear on the surface of society: through the mutual influence of capitals, through competition, and through the ordinary consciousness of agents of production.

Together with this it becomes possible to explicate the various forms of market fetishism as they appear objectively in reality and are admitted without criticism at different levels of social consciousness. This is why Marx insists that ‘in a social order dominated by capitalist production even the non-capitalist producer is gripped by capitalist images’. The inversed ideas dominating the fetishist consciousness have as their precondition some specific, real ontological processes. What does Marx have in mind? The process of production and the process of circulation constantly turn into each other and in this way they constantly suggest a converted idea about their delimitating characteristics. The production of surplus value, as well as of value in general, acquires new features in the process of circulation and after the capital has gone through this circle of its conversions it enters from its internal organic life into relationship with the outside world. It enters into relationships not in the sense that capital and labor are opposed to each other but capital to capital, on one side, and individuals to each other, on the other side, occur as sellers and buyers: ‘The time of circulation and working-time cross paths and thus both seem to determine surplus-value. The original form in which capital and wage-labor confront one another is disguised through the intervention of relationships seemingly independent of it. Surplus-value itself does not appear as the product of the appropriation of labor-time, but as an excess of the selling price of commodities over their cost-price; the latter thus being easily represented as their actual value (*valeur intrinsèque*), while profit appears as an excess of the selling price of commodities over their immanent value.’ Conversions born by capital in the

field of production and circulation lead to a situation where 'the relationships of capital are obscured by the fact that all parts of capital appear equally as the source of excess value (profit); the capitalist relationship is mystified.' These conversions are an expression of the development of that confusion between subject and object which takes place still in the process of production.

Marx attempted to prove the way in which there all still subjective production forces of labor (shown as forces of production in capital). This led him to conclude that 'on the one hand, the value, or the past labor, which dominates living labor, is personified by the capitalist; on the other hand, the laborer appears as bare material labor-power, as a commodity. Still in the simple relations of production this inverted relationship necessarily produces certain correspondingly inverted images, a transposed consciousness, which is further developed by the conversions and modifications of the actual circulation process.' The mystification of the basic structure-determining relation, i.e., the economic relation of the capitalist society as reproduced and traced in Marx's analysis in those of its forms which in one or another way take part, cooperate, and influence the social organism in its entirety.

Economic mystification happens still in the process relating production and circulation where the profit appears as a converted form of surplus value; a form where the origin of profit and the secret of its being are obscured and obliterated. Although the rate of profit thus differs numerically from the rate of surplus-value, while surplus-value and profit are actually the same thing and numerically equal. In effect, profit is the form in which surplus-value presents itself to the view, and must initially be stripped by analysis to disclose the latter. In surplus-value, the relation between capital and labor is laid bare; in the relation of capital to profit, i.e., of capital to surplus-value that appears, on the one hand, as excess over the cost-price of commodities realized in the process of circulation and, on the other, as a surplus more closely determined by its relation to the total capital. Then capital appears as a relation to itself, a relation in which it, as the original sum of value, is distinguished from the new value which it generated.

One is conscious that capital generates this new value by its movement in the processes of production and circulation. But the way in which this

occurs is cloaked in mystery and appears to originate from hidden qualities inherent in capital itself. 'The more we study the capital value-increase process, the more capitalist relationships are mystified and less of the secret of its internal organism is disclosed.' In the field of competition where direct economic relations are already mediated by other forms of social life, economic mystification shows its vitality and adaptation through its metamorphoses. In other words, in the field of competition economic mystification is more and more closely surrounded by the processes of social interaction so it does not reveal 'that value which dominates the movement of production; and the values that lie beneath the prices of production and that determine them in the last instance.' Marx cites three instances for this phenomenon: average profits are a form of exploitation owing to the principle of competition, the rise and fall of prices in a market-value economy would seem to contradict the value of commodities, and other fluctuations in market-value follow bear the same contradictions. Labor time and market-value can never be in concord. From this point of view, the liberal thesis about competition as a panacea for the social organism is nothing but a political expression of the fetishism of commodities.

The fetishism of commodities as a general form of social relations in capitalism includes different forms of economic fetishism. For Marx, besides competition these are the converted forms through which the main economic relations of social processes of production appear on the surface, through which they are received by society. It is about the formulas capital-profit, land-rent, labor-salary. The first is sufficient in itself. This relation reaches its most irrational expression under the form of interest-bearing capital. In this form expressed in the formula  $M-M'$ , where  $M$  stands for money. He notes that in interest-bearing capital, there is a fetish with rising value, money generating money, and this is revealed by how money no longer bears the birth-marks of its origin. Marx calls this 'transformation without content'.

One of the relations inverted here is that between interest and profit or 'fetish capital' - 'In  $M-M'$  we have the meaningless form of capital, the perversion and materialization of production relations in their highest

degree, the interest-bearing form, the simple form of capital in which it antecedes its own process of reproduction ... a mystification of capital in its most flagrant form.’ This makes the relationship between the process of materialization of social relations among people more than obvious. The social circulation of market forms constantly reproduces objective forms of ideas of the fetish mind. Therefore, ‘for vulgar political economy, which seeks to represent capital as an independent source of value, of value creation, this form is naturally a veritable discovery, a form in which the source of profit is no longer discernible, and in which the result of the capitalist process of production, divorced from the process, acquires an independent existence.’

Moreover, the development of irrational forms as special forms of the actual being is identical to the enlargement of the objective relations between people with the transformation of the society into a super-system in which the last of illusions about the unlimited freedom of the individual activity, so characteristic for the time of early bourgeois revolutions, completely disappears. The counter-productive power of anonymous material forces is also revealed by Marx through an ontological absurdity. We owe to Marx the revelation of the reality of essential forms of social mimicry in capitalist society. Some of them have not changed and the new ones have nothing in common with the creature to which they belong. As far as globalization is concerned, in terms of Marx’s theory it is a direct expression of the universalization of material dependence, but its self-ended direction already points to its historical limit.



## **Regional Identities: Essentialist and Constructionist Interpretations**

Plamen Makariev

The aim of this paper is to introduce more conceptual clarity into the debate on regionalism and, more concretely, on the contradiction between the state-centered model of social life and the tendency toward decentralization as well as the delegation of authority to local intra-national and international, economic and cultural entities.

“Regionalism” is a term with more than one meaning. In this paper it refers to the relatively recent development, directed toward the solution of social and political problems, which ensues from the discrepancies between national and cultural borders. In many places throughout the world, for various reasons, the population of a territory, which was once unified by intense economic cooperation and exchange, as well as by cultural commonalities and affinities, turned out to be divided between two or more states. Localities, which were once a center of vibrant economic and cultural life, found themselves in a peripheral position because of the redistribution of territories among the states. In most cases this has brought about a decline in the social and cultural life of the people who inhabit these regions and also to the waste or neglect of natural and human resources present there. The recent decades have witnessed a new interest in this issue by the international community and by the regions’ populations alike. Administrative measures are carried out and economic activities are being promoted mostly on the initiative of international institutions but also as a result of bilateral or multilateral cooperation between neighboring states. This development brings to the fore theoretical issues which have to be solved or at least clarified in order to remove possible obstacles to the success of regionalism.

I am trying to answer three questions, ordered consecutively, in a cascade-like manner. The first is: what should be regarded in this context as an alternative to a rigid national identity - the ideology of liberal

individualism, or the establishment of new, emergent collective identities. In the second case, how should these identities be conceived - as historical ones which have always existed but which have been suppressed by the nation-states, and are now being rediscovered, or as newly constructed cultural ones? And, if the second alternative is accepted, what are the moral limits of constructionism; in other words, where is the demarcation between identity-construction and manipulation?

### **Individual and collective identity**

My answer to the first question is definitely in favor of the collective-identities alternative. The other option is to oppose the nationalist notion of identity as being some kind of individualism. It can be a cosmopolitan, or a pan-European individualism, which amounts to adopting a cultural identity of such scope that it is actually void of content. It can be the individualism professed by the ideology of citizenship; i.e., the person identifies with the just political order in his or her country and not with any particular cultural community.<sup>1</sup> In all these models culture is regarded as a private affair. The public policy should be neutral with regard of such idiosyncrasies.

The critique against liberal individualism can be based on different methodologies. It can come from the camp of communitarianism - in such case it is more radical. Charles Taylor for example represents identity as essentially dialogical; i.e., the self-esteem of an individual depends to a great extent on the appreciation by the others of his or her culture<sup>2</sup>. A more moderate version of criticism is built upon basic liberal premises, but points out reasons in favor of the importance and value of cultural identity. Ronald Dworkin<sup>3</sup> and Joseph Raz claim that culture is a necessary condition for a “meaningful individual choice”, i.e. a choice of good life which is made among a rich set of alternatives. Others, e.g. Yael Tamir, maintain that cultural membership makes our activities more valuable by integrating them into a collective, “...continuous, creative effort whereby culture is made and

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<sup>1</sup> Patten 2000, 193.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor 1994, 25

<sup>3</sup> Dworkin 1985, 232 and Joseph Raz 1994.



remade”.<sup>4</sup> W. Kymlicka insists that a societal culture is a necessary condition for meaningful life.<sup>5</sup> Many more arguments can be presented in favor of the culturalist programs for the establishment of regional identities.

The answer to the second question (about the nature of cultural identities) can be arrived upon via a critical analysis of the essentialist and constructionist approaches to identity. The former is characterized by viewing identity as an essence: first, as a stable (conservative) entity; second, as sovereign, by which we mean not yielding to external influences; third is homogeneous, that which does not allow substantial internal diversity; the fourth is discrete (not “mixing” with other identities); and fifth, hierarchical (manifesting itself as essence through appearances). Besides, essentialism implies a strong normative appeal - any deviation from the standards just mentioned is condemned as degradation (in the first case), betrayal (in the second), disintegration (in the third case), contamination (in the fourth) and distortion (in the last case) of identity. Constructionism, on the other hand, is an approach which interprets all traits of cultural identity as products of invention, motivated by the current historical situation in which the respective community has shaped or reshaped its self-consciousness.

### **Essentialism**

More concretely, from an essentialist viewpoint, if an identity changes, it would cease to be itself. It would become Other. Hence, if we consider an identity to be valuable, we should do our best to conserve it as it is, to keep it in its authentic form. Traditions, mores, folklore should be preserved from the corrosive effects of time. Even a self-development of the community which implies changes in its way of life would not be considered desirable.

An example of such public policy is the reservations for the indigenous populations in the USA. Out of respect to the specific culture of these communities, the state has imposed norms that hinder the individuals who belong to them to adopt a modern life style. The aim is to perpetuate their traditional way of life in the same manner as the environmentalists

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<sup>4</sup> Tamir 1993, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Kymlicka 1995, 76.

struggle for the preservation of species.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, from this point of view, identity should be resistant to influences from without. If a community (a state, an ethnic or religious group) is open for input from the outside, it does not take its identity seriously. An indiscriminate, uncritical acceptance of all kinds of such influences means that this community has no “backbone”, its identity is doomed. An example of such concern is the official French attitude to internationally accepted technical terms of English origin - e.g. *ordinateur* instead of computer.

The next parameter of the essentialist notion of identity is homogeneity. What is considered undesirable in this aspect is the internal diversity of the group's life such as contradictory tendencies of development, different lifestyles, competing solidarities, ideological oppositions, etc. A group or a category of people which is marred by internal diversity of this kind does not have a healthy identity. These people are not really certain about who they are.

Emblematic for this essentialist approach to identity are stereotypical expressions of the sort “Bulgarians are like that”, or “A German in such a situation would do this and this” as if there are not many different kinds of Bulgarians, Germans, etc. So, the critics of essentialism often point out a connection between this methodology and stereotyping.<sup>7</sup>

Another target of essentialist resistance is all forms of cultural syncretism, or cultural hybridization, or trans-culturality. These are phenomena which are often observed in the contact points of cultures and civilizations, so to say, at their peripheries. They are due to the mutual enrichment of cultures, to the exchange of elements between them. For example, in the Rhodopi region in the Balkans (located both in Bulgaria and in Greece) we may witness the cohabitation of Christians, Moslems of Turkish origin, and Moslems of Bulgarian origin (*Pomatsi*). The latter serve as a cultural transmission between Christians and Moslems and as a result this coexistence has brought about a substantial syncretism in the religious practices of the three communities. In an essentialist perspective, however,

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<sup>6</sup> Habermas 1994, 128.

<sup>7</sup> See Narayan 1998, 86.

such forms of mutual enrichment, which in reality play a positive role for the neighbor-like relations, are considered to be a contamination of the identities and to have a desecrating effect.

Another problematic issue in this respect are the so called “hyphenated identities”. They are typical for immigrants. From an essentialist viewpoint, true trans-culturality is impossible. One of the two elements (also termed the two identities) should prevail. One should decide, once and for all, whether he or she is Turkish or German (e.g., if this is a person with Turkish parents but born as a second or third generation immigrant in Germany).

And finally some words about the hierarchical notion of identity, i.e. identity as essence, as a hidden, internal structure which is situated under the superficial properties of group life.<sup>8</sup> These properties are manifestations, more or less adequate of the essence; whence the term “essentialism”. And at this point we have maybe the most characteristic feature of essentialist thinking: the conjunction of identity and authenticity. In such a frame of reference it is meaningful to use expressions like “a true Bulgarian” or “a true Moslem”. It is a moral obligation of the individual and the group to act in accordance with their inner nature, i.e., with their essence. Otherwise they behave in a distorted, corrupt manner because they are deemed weak, irresponsible or superficial personalities.

### **Constructionism**

In a sketch-like manner, this view on identity can be represented as precisely the opposite of the essentialist one. The identity of a group can change and still the group can remain identical to itself. A group’s way of life can adapt to the circumstances, it may be flexible, and there is nothing wrong in this. Every identity is complex and reproduces itself in time dynamically through interplay of the various tendencies and oppositions within its realm. The hybridization and hyphenation of identities are inevitable, and we should learn to live with them. And, finally, it is meaningless to try to differentiate between essence and appearance in the life of a group. Depending on the situation different elements of this life can be more important than others and in the next moment their relative weight

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<sup>8</sup> See Haslam 1998, 292.

can change. It is also meaningless to differentiate between authentic and distorted behavior. No one can claim monopoly over the authenticity of a cultural community. What is authentic and what is not depends on the perspective in which we regard the events.

The paradigmatic incommensurability between the essentialist and the constructionist accounts of identity is due to a fundamental difference in the approach to it. In the former case, identity is considered to be essence, something which determines the life of the group and which has intrinsic value. In the latter case identity is regarded as construction, as a product of the creative activity of the individuals who make up the group. It is a means which serves the survival and the well being of its bearers. "The constructionist approach, then, sees ethnic and racial identities as highly variable and contingent products of an ongoing interaction between, on the one hand, the circumstances groups encounter (including the conceptions and actions of outsiders) and, on the other, the actions and conceptions of group members - of insiders. It makes ethnic groups active agents in the making and remaking of their own identities, and it views construction not as a one-time event but as continuous and historical."<sup>9</sup>

The constructionist theories of identity emphasize two elements in its production: one is the activity of the group in the formation, reproduction in time, and reformation of its self-consciousness and, hence, of its way of life; the second one is the dependence of this activity on the circumstances. Recently a special term has been introduced by some theorists "circumstantialism".<sup>10</sup> Besides, identity is regarded not as a static reality, but as process. S. Hall writes, "the question is not who we are but what can we become, how have we been represented, and how has this affected our capacities to represent ourselves."<sup>11</sup>

Actually all this pretentious theory refers to activities, which are quite familiar to everybody. Identity is being constructed by founding organizations, by celebrating occasions related to the history of the group, by promoting historical and cultural research, by founding and supporting

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<sup>9</sup> Hartmann 1998, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Hall 1996, 4.

media, by practicing the folklore and the traditions of the group, especially in the public sphere, by producing artistic events, musical and literary pieces, showing the merits of the group, by inflating the prestige of outstanding representatives of the group who have contributed to the good of the country or of mankind as a whole by their achievements in the arts, science or technology, and also - by selecting and glorifying certain historical and cultural heroes that belonged to the group as role models (especially with regard to the formation of the mentality of the young generation).

In fact all these practices are being conducted everywhere. The difference between their essentialist and their constructionist versions is that in the first case they are conceived as revealing and showing to the public certain objective traits of the group's identity which have existed such as they are independently of the will and interests of the individuals who make up the group and it is the duty of these individuals to know them, to appreciate them, and to struggle for the accomplishment of the ideals that are embodied by them. In the second case, however, the same activities are understood as a means to promote the interests of the people who belong to the group by placing the group in the most favorable conditions possible in the current social situation. As B. McSweeney puts it, "Collective identity is not out there, waiting to be discovered. What is 'out there' is identity discourse on the part of political leaders, intellectuals, and countless others who engage in the process of constructing, negotiating, manipulating or affirming a response to the demand (at times urgent, mostly absent) for a collective image."<sup>12</sup>

In both cases it is possible to have competing interpretations of the historical and present facts - it is possible to have alternative answer to questions of the sort: "What is our origin? Who have been and who are our friends and our foes? Which literary figures can be regarded as an emanation of our national character? and so on. However, from an essentialist point of view, this is a competition of hypotheses about objective facts, and only one of them can be true in any of the controversies. On the contrary, in the constructionist account, these are competing initiatives, all

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<sup>12</sup> McSweeney 1999, 77-78.

of them aiming at the optimization of the group's identity with regard to its social environment.

### **National and regional identities**

In this frame of reference the typical national identity presents itself as a constructed one which claims at the same time to be conceived as essence, i.e. the ideology of national identity is essentialist on the surface but "crypto-constructionist" in fact. Among the ideologies of regionalism, on the other hand, two types can be distinguished: an essentialist one, with a strong emancipative message, and a more or less overtly constructionist type. I shall try to illustrate them (the essentialist and the constructionist approach to the regional identities) by an example from the Balkans.

In a part of former Yugoslavia live different groups of ethnic Albanians. The greatest part of this population is in Kosovo, quite a numerous group (in the west of the Republic of Macedonia, some), and in Southern Serbia. Besides, we have the state of Albania nearby. Politically this is a troubled region and a regionalist approach can possibly help to ease the nationalist tensions by satisfying to some extent the claims of these people for more respect to their common identity and greater freedom for self-governance, without reshaping the state borders. What about the role, which the Albanian ethnic identity can play in this situation?

If an essentialist approach is applied to this identity, this would bring about a quest for the true and only Albanian essence (by means of anthropological and historical research, and also of public debate), which would be an endeavor to find a definitive answer to the question "What does it mean to be Albanian?" as a matter of rediscovering a reality which has been there for many centuries but which has been neglected, forgotten out of carelessness or because of deliberate, hostile manipulations by enemies. And further, this would lead to aligning all activities, political and ideological, of the elite of this regional population to the need of uniting all the various groups around this identity. This could guide them how to live a dignified life. Whether this means a struggle for unification into a new Albanian state, or for joining the existing Republic of Albania, or for something else in this direction is another issue. The main consequence will be that the activity of the people will have to be oriented according to goals,

dictated by something which is taken for granted, i.e. the Albanian identity as essence.

If the alternative constructionist approach is applied, the guiding light for the activity in question will be the interests of the individuals who make up the Albanian population in the region, or according to a more moderate version, their common good. Yes, their cultural identity should matter to them (for reasons already mentioned) but this need not be an identity which is inherited from the past. It can be created as the best possible basis for a common life, adapted to the existing circumstances. The ideal Albanian in this case will not be the true Albanian, but the, so to say, happy Albanian. The historical memories, the traditions, the mores of the people – all this should be taken into account and interpreted in the most appropriate way with regard to the circumstances.

All this sounds well. However, the critics of constructionism point out that it can be qualified as an immoral, instrumentalist approach to identity - as a limitless opportunism which can resort to any manipulation for the sake of achieving some goal. At this point the debate “essentialism-constructionism” overlaps with another one: the “primordialism-instrumentalism” one. The argument in the second case is about the means and the end. From a primordialist viewpoint collective identity is the ultimate value; it has a constitutive meaning for the personality of the individual who belongs to the respective community. You are the person who you are because of your identity. On the contrary, an instrumentalist would claim that human beings are first and foremost rational individuals who can freely choose their goals. Therefore their cultural identity is something that can be used as a means to achieve them.

These interpretations of identity fit very well into two of the four types of social action, which have been defined by M. Weber: value-rational and instrumentally rational action.<sup>13</sup> The former is determined by belief in the unconditional, intrinsic value of a given mode of behaviour, and the latter by an end in relation to which the action is conceived as means. J. Habermas proposes an alternative typology: action oriented to reaching understanding (communicative action) and action oriented to success (which can be

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<sup>13</sup> Weber 1978, 24-25.

instrumental, if it is performed in a non-social situation, or strategic, if done in a social one).<sup>14</sup>

The author of *The Theory of Communicative Action* distinguishes success-oriented from communicative action mainly on the basis of the mode in which they are determined. In the former case the agent decides what to do himself. In the latter he coordinates his behaviour with the persons that will be affected by his action. It is in this sense that Habermas defines communicative action as oriented to reaching understanding (not in the cognitive, but in a normative aspect, as *Verstaendigung*). In other words, the agent is not guided by his own will alone, but takes into account the positions of the other persons involved - their positions as free, equal, and rational beings. The action would not be communicative if the consent of the Others is achieved through coercion or manipulation.

So, if a restriction is imposed upon the constructionist activities, exercised by the members of a community with regard to their collective identity, namely that these activities should be of the communicative-action type, there may be some hope that they would not be morally problematic. If the construction and reconstruction of the common identity takes place with the participation, or at least the silent approval of all members of the community who are interested, the “product” of these activities would be an identity which serves the common Good of the members and “embodies” their culture. It would not be an instrument for the satisfaction of the selfish interests of the community’s elite but a genuine realization of the common will and aspirations of the community’s members.

As a result of the further development of the paradigm of communicative rationality, most notably by Habermas himself but also by K.-O. Apel, J. Elster, J. Cohen, J. Fishkin, A. Gutmann, S. Benhabib and others in the form of Discourse Ethics and the theory of deliberative democracy, a more articulate methodology of social regulation has been outlined which could be used for a deliberate, self-reflective, so to say “enlightened” construction and reconstruction of cultural identities.

The theories of deliberative democracy advocate a new mode of decision-making - a rational discussion among free and equal citizens,

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<sup>14</sup> Habermas 1981, 285.



which yields solutions that are accepted to be in the interest of all people affected. It should be an exchange of arguments which aim to justify one or another alternative of regulating social relations as being equally in the interest of all.<sup>15</sup> The compelling “force” in this process of decision-making would not be the will of the majority (as in the traditional democratic procedure), nor the will of the persons who happen to have some kind of leverage to influence the other participants in the decision-making (as is the case in ordinary bargaining), but the “force of the better argument”. This means that it should be enough to demonstrate rationally that a given solution suits best the common interest or, in other versions of the theory, contributes most to the common good<sup>16</sup> in order to compel everyone to accept it - at least in public.

In addition to being rational, this deliberation should also be inclusive and public, free of any external coercion, taking place between equals (the social positions, the prestige, etc. of the interlocutors should not be taken into account), in order for its outcomes to be recognized as legitimate decisions by the public.<sup>17</sup>

If this methodology is applied as a normative framework in the construction and reconstruction of identities, the resulting claims for rights and reforms (especially in the regionalist context) can be regarded as legitimate. Even the typical problematic characteristics of identity construction, associated with an antagonistic attitude of “us” against “them” can be dealt with if the process of identity formation and reformation takes place as self-reflective public deliberation; i.e., with the promotion of the self-confidence of the in-group at the expense of cultivating a feeling of superiority over the out-group. If the people involved are aware of the dialogical mechanisms, in both internal and external aspects, through which identities takes shape, it is less probable that they will take seriously any kind of pretensions for ethnic or regional supremacy.

Therefore, the theory of communicative action, Discourse Ethics and the theories of deliberative democracy, in my opinion, open prospects for a

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Benhabib 1996, 69.

<sup>16</sup> See Cohen 1989, 17.

<sup>17</sup> See Habermas 1998, 305.

synthesis of the values of constructionism and essentialism, which are quite promising with regard to the positive development of regional identities.

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# CULTURAL CADENZA

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## THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF NEW YORK

W. Stephen Croddy

For someone to be an intellectual, it is necessary that they be interested in ideas and their relationships. Thus in most areas of the United States anyone in academia actively engaged in research can qualify as an intellectual. New York, however, is an exception. Its concept of an intellectual is more European, particularly French in orientation.<sup>1</sup> Here, not only must an intellectual be interested in ideas, these ideas must include particular subjects, most certainly the arts and perhaps also politics. Similar to continental Europe, in New York an intellectual must be culturally and socially aware. This may explain why one commonly hears of the concept of a New York intellectual. But one rarely hears of someone being an intellectual with regard to any other American city, e.g. a Los Angeles intellectual or a Boston intellectual.

Two of the more recent prominent New York intellectuals were Susan Sontag (1933-2004) and Edward Said (1935-2003). Illustrative of New York's inclusiveness, one was Jewish, the latter Palestinian. Sontag was the author of fiction, essays, and drama. Her subjects covered a broad spectrum:

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Acocella, "The Hunger Artist", *Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 440-1. As recently pointed out in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the English in reaction to the French shy away from the concept of an intellectual. The English influence may help explain why the concept is not as prominent in America as it is in France and other continental countries.

literature, film, opera, drama, dance, painting, photography, politics, illness.<sup>2</sup> She frequently contributed to *The New York Review of Books*, a publication similar to London's the *Times Literary Supplement* and Paris's *La Nouvelle Observateur*. For Sontag, "a writer is someone who pays attention to the world"<sup>3</sup> and cultural criticism "is what being an intellectual, as opposed to a writer, is. Since the time of Diderot and Voltaire, this has become the vocation of the modern writer: to advance critical or adversarial ideas about culture."<sup>4</sup>

Said, professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, was the author of twenty-one books that included not only his academic research but also his thinking on politics and classical music.<sup>5</sup> The catholicity of his interests is provocatively illustrated in the published conversations between him and Daniel Barenboim, the latter being a paradigmatic example of a European intellectual rooted in the arts.<sup>6</sup>

As a New York intellectual is obliged to be engaged in the arts and social issues, with all that the city offers, this is never a question. Many of the world's leading performing arts organizations want to bring their productions here. Just two among numerous examples this summer were a production from the Peking Opera and a concert of music and dance from Mongolia. Another highlight was Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, performed by the Kirov Opera under the leadership of Valery Gergiev, acclaimed artistic director of the Mariinsky Theatre in St.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Acocella, "The Hunger Artist", 438.

<sup>3</sup> Her 2003 acceptance speech "Literature is Freedom" at the Paulskirche, Frankfurt, for the Fiedenspreis (Peace Prize) of the German Book Trade. See *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches*, Paolo Dilonardo and Anne Jump, eds. (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Leland Paogue, ed. *Conversations with Susan Sontag* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1965), 238.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of works in the latter two domains are *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001) and *Musical Explorations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Ara Guzelimian, ed. *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003). See also Barenboim's bibliography *A Life in Music* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002).

Petersburg. The wait of almost two years for this production was clearly worth it for New York intellectuals. With his penetrating interpretations of Wagner's music, accompanied by visually effective staging, Maestro Gergiev gave intellectuals much to think about. This coming season, the Metropolitan Opera will be presenting the eagerly anticipated productions of Wagner's *Die Walkurie* under the direction of Lorin Maazel and *Tristan und Isolde* under the direction of James Levine. New York intellectuals will be interested in comparing their interpretations of Wagner to Gergiev's.

Next door at Lincoln Center, the New York City Opera will present *Margaret Garner*, a new work by Toni Morrison and Richard Danielport. Other productions include Handel's *Agrippina* and Samuel Barber's *Vanessa*. In contrast are the offerings of the World Music Institute. Two recent productions were the well-known Portuguese *fado* singer Mariza at Carnegie Hall and Argentine Nights: Celebrating Tango at Symphony Space. All of these offerings are just some indications of the enormous variety of what New York considers as not only culture life but intellectual life.

In addition to opera, New York's world of theater has long been associated with intellectual life. One of the highlights of the past theatre season was the performance by the British actress Vanessa Redgrave of *The Year of Magical Thinking* by the American author Joan Didion. Didion's book of the same name was a best-seller the previous year. It is a recounting of the year immediately following the death of her husband John Gregory Dunn, who was also a writer.<sup>7</sup> Also notable were the presentations by England's Royal Shakespeare Company of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Chekhov's *The Seagull* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Both starred Ian McKellen and were directed by Trevor Nunn.<sup>8</sup>

New York's world of dance is impressively displayed by the year-long performances at the Joyce Theatre as well as the annual seasons presented by the American Ballet Theatre and the New York City Ballet. In addition,

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<sup>7</sup> Joan Didion, *Year of Magical Thinking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 2005).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov*, Lillian Hellman, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc. 1984).

an exceptional event was *Mozart Dances* by the Mark Morris Dance Company in conjunction with the pianist Emanuel Ax at the Lincoln Center Festival this summer. Morris integrated beautifully his lyrical choreography with Mozart's refined melodies. As in continental Europe, music is also considered an intellectual engagement.

Along with such art institutions as the Frick Collection, the Guggenheim Museum, the Neue Gallery, the Whitney Museum, and the Morgan Library, an intellectual must not fail to become acquainted with the permanent collections at the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art as well as their frequent special exhibitions. "The Age of Rembrandt" is a current show at the Metropolitan. Earlier this year it presented "Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde". Included were rarely seen works by many of the French masters from the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth. A recent notable exhibit at the Modern was a retrospective of the American sculptor Richard Serra. These exhibitions not only serve the public appetite for art, they direct the intellectual conversations of New York.

This is merely a sample of the endless variety of New York's cultural life. In light of its quality as well as its quantity, one can understand why it must be an integral part of the life of the city's intellectuals.



## Book Review

Temenuga Trifonova, *The Image in French Philosophy*,  
Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi Press, 2007, 316 pp., \$83

*The Image in French Philosophy* is the recent book by Temenuga Trifonova, a Bulgarian who lives and works in Canada where she is Assistant Professor of Film Studies at the University of New Brunswick. She works in film and philosophy, film theory, European and American cinema, film adaptation and remakes, science fiction cinema and aesthetics. Probably due to her rich background, she offers a new perspective in thinking about metaphysics in twentieth-century French Philosophy. She suggests this is a period of revival—in opposition to all the proclamations by Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, etc., that metaphysics, in the twentieth century, “is dead.” She builds her principal assertions on an interpretation of Bergson, Sartre, Lyotard, Baudrillard and Deleuze, viewing their philosophy not as a critique but as a revival of metaphysics, a thinking about impersonal forces distinguished by an aversion of the philosophical gaze from the discourse of vision, and thus away from the image.

Metaphysics in general is a philosophical study whose object is to determine the real nature of things—to determine the meaning, structure, and principles of whatever is insofar as it is. Among the general topics of metaphysics are those about mind and matter, the Universe, identity and change, space and time, necessity and possibility, religion and spirituality, abstract objects and mathematics, determinism and free will, cosmology and cosmogony, and so on. Metaphysics has been attacked at different times in history for being futile and too vague. The main critique of metaphysics has to do with reality in the metaphysical context. By the metaphysician's own admission, reality is inaccessible to the senses; as Plato explained, it can be discovered only by pure intelligence, and only if the latter can shake itself free of bodily encumbrances. Some of the most prominent philosophers to have criticized metaphysics are David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Karl Popper and Friedrich Nietzsche. In the paradigm of twentieth-century French philosophy, it is Jacques Derrida who, in *Of Grammatology*, finds that metaphysics, to put it

briefly, is founded on oppositions seeking to establish a stability of meaning through conceptual absolutes wherein one term—for example, "good"—is elevated to a status that designates its opposite—in this case, "evil"—as its perversion, lack, or inferior. These "violent hierarchies," as Derrida terms them, are structurally unstable in the very texts where the meaning strictly depends on this contradiction or antinomy. Derrida insists that deconstruction is never performed or executed but "takes place" through "memory work." Therefore, the task of the "deconstructionist" is to show where this oppositional or dialectical stability was ultimately subverted by the internal logic of a text. Meticulous readings discover philosophy anew. Often, the result of this renewal is to provide striking interpretations of texts. No "meaning" is stable. Derrida calls "metaphysics of presence" the agency that maintains the sense of unity within a text where presence is accorded the privilege of truth. Unlike these statements, Trifonova's work is very innovative and interesting because she concentrates on the image becoming a part of the discourse of subjective representation. This image separates from the subject and creates its own discourse of subjective representation, as well as a new, vivid and ethically better justified metaphysical discourse. This is a metaphysics of immanence, more interested in consciousness than in subjectivity, in the inhuman than in the human, in the virtual than in the real, in time than in temporalization, in memory than in memory-images, in the imagination than in images; in sum, in impersonal forces, de-personalizing experience, states of disembodiment characterized by the breaking down of the sensory-motor schema (Bergson's pure memory, Sartre's image consciousness, Deleuze's time image) or, more generally, in that which lies beyond representation, i.e., beyond subjectivity (Lyotard's sublime, Baudrillard's fatal objects).

Temenuga Trifonova's book is unique because it draws connections between five philosophers who have been usually seen as being too different in their subject matter. She brings together what on the surface appears to be unrelated topics: ontology (Bergson), the phenomenology of the image (Sartre), the Kantian and the postmodern sublime (Lyotard), the simulacrum (Baudrillard), philosophy of film (Deleuze)—with a view to teasing out their shared disgust with, or ontological embarrassment by, subjectivity.

*The Image in French Philosophy* is divided into six chapters. Chapter

one, “Bergson’s Matter-Image: The Degradation of the Impersonal,” examines Bergson’s image ontology as articulated in *Matter and Memory* and focuses on the “the impersonal.” Image ontology occupies a central place in the metaphysics of immanence. The author chooses Bergson because of his point of view on isolated what is seen—*déjà vu*, which is a particular form of recollection that taps into an ontologically anterior impersonal memory—as a privileged experience revealing the mind’s essential difference from matter, namely its capacity for memory.

Chapter two, “Sartre’s Image-Consciousness: The Allergic Reaction to Matter,” follows Sartre’s critique of Bergson in *Imagination* and *The Psychology of Imagination* with the intention of foregrounding Sartre’s “disgust” at subjectivity and his (indirect) complicity with the revival of metaphysics as the study of impersonal forces such as “image-consciousness.” Sartre credits image-consciousness, which lacks an object other than itself, with the power of disclosing the basic structure of consciousness as an annihilation of reality.

Chapter three, “Lyotard’s Sublime: The Ontologization of the Image,” examines the postmodern idea of the sublime in order to show how the image has been stripped of its aesthetic attributes and endowed with philosophical responsibility and significance. Trifonova emphasizes the ontologization of the image, that is, the re-conceptualization of the image as an *event-through*. She also analyzes Lyotard’s critique of Kant in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Here, what is important is Lyotard’s identification of the postmodern sublime—the experience of consciousness as “event” or “origin”: for instance, a privileged type of experience on account of its reduction of subjectivity to the mode of existence of a bare material point and its total interruption of any form of inspiration (memory, thought, reason, history). He describes the “sensation of being” provoked by the sublime as an absolute loss of self, a certain self-forgetfulness or lack of self-consciousness more common to an automaton or a puppet than to a subject.

Chapter four, “Baudrillard’s Simulacrum: The End of Visibility,” explores the postmodern transformation of the Bergsonian concepts of the virtual and the impersonal, especially with reference to and from the point of view of Baudrillard’s ideas of the fatal and the hyperreal. Baudrillard,

according to Trifonova, suggests that our last chance for transcendence in a saturated over-signified world is the Pure (Fatal) Object, which seduces by virtue of its “fatal” unintelligibility or meaninglessness, by its total resistance to interpretation and representation.

Chapter five, “Deleuze’s Time-Image: Getting Rid of Ourselves,” draws attention to Deleuze’s contribution to aesthetics through ontology in his two books on cinema, both of which, Trifonova argues, are mostly concerned with what the film image can do for thinking rather than with specifically filmic (aesthetic) qualities of the image.

Our author draws attention to Deleuze because of his theory of the “time-image” and because Deleuze’s direct image of time as a quasi-Nietzschean impersonal force of “falsification” is the last in this series of concepts whose main function (and effect) is to revive metaphysics as thinking pertaining to impersonal forces rather than to the subject (according to Lyotard); a thinking concerned with pure memory, imagination, event, origin, time, destiny/fatality, with the conditions of possibility for selectivity (pre-reflective, the pure, the impersonal, the inhuman) rather than with subjectivity itself.

Trifonova chooses to consider exactly these philosophers because of their aversion to subjectivity. However, the aversion of the philosophical gaze away from the image, and the projection of invisible impersonal forces or a realm “behind” the image, is by no means limited to their works.

In Chapter six, “Imaginary Time in Contemporary Cinema,” Trifonova relates the notion of the impersonal to the phenomenon of imaginary time in contemporary cinema. The chapter is a good case study of contemporary film productions that focus the viewer’s attention on the prolegomena to a “metaphysical” cinema, on the impersonal in cinema, on the infinite and the virtual.

*The Image in French Philosophy* is an extremely rich and innovative work and provides many new perspectives for thinking about the image and metaphysics in the present, in the times in which we live, in a new Information Age that places people in an extremely new condition of living and perceiving. This book will be of interest to scholars and students of philosophy, aesthetics, and film theory, bringing them to think about contemporary philosophy in a new way.

## **Philosophy at Klagenfurt**

The Institute of Philosophy at the University of Klagenfurt has expressed interest in cooperating with *Sofia Philosophical Review*. Philosophy at Klagenfurt draws upon the Group Dynamics Program, which was established at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary and Post-Graduate Studies in 2006. The link between Group Dynamics and Philosophy is documented, on one hand, by the modules “Introduction to Philosophy” and “Philosophical Practice” and, on the other, by the overall conception and the lecture delivering method. Practical realization of Philosophy is achieved through its own mediation, which always bears a social character. Therefore, social skills development is the most important perspective for school teachers and students who need always to have in mind the existing social relations in order to be in a position to apply their time, energy, and knowledge. Besides, modules “Philosophy of Technology and Media” and “Aesthetics” are also relatively well represented.

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