

What is a Fiction?

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We would like to point out some lines of thought for a reflection on the notion of *fiction*, which will be considered principally from the point of view of its epistemological interest, probably as a priority in social and psychological sciences, but also in other sciences. One may grant Bentham that that the notion appeared mainly in the domain of law, politics, and ethics since the Latin *jurisconsults* very early talked of a *fictio juris*. Nevertheless, what, from the XVIIIth century, has been called *aesthetics*, which has, for much longer, consisted in a reflection on images, paintings, sculptures, architectures and poetry, largely contributed to give the word *fiction* an important part of its meaning, through the problematic of likeness, which is still topical. Following the Greeks¹, the Latins opposed *facere* (to make) to *fingere* (to feign), which resulted in the word *fiction*². The different meanings got intertwined in what Bentham called the same “import”³ of the word, but will not be disentangled here. The limited aim of our talk is not so much to trace the genealogy of the notion of *fiction* as to root a certain number of concepts into that notion, taking as a fact that it inherited diverse threads woven together. But, though this reflection is made within deliberately more restricted limits than those it should have and is carried out, on principle and preferably, in epistemology and history of sciences, it will not be exhaustive nor even conclusive. To reach such a level, it would have to be much subtler, in particular in the domain of logical technique,

¹ The word *πλάσμα* was used to talk about that notion.

² That is the meaning given to it by some XVIIth century authors as Descartes or Pascal, who, in *Pensées* (Br., 453, Laf., 211), talked of *figmentum malum*. Bentham also gave that meaning to the word *fiction* when he made it an equivalent of “a mere figment of imagination” in some of his formulas (*The works of Jeremy Bentham*, éd. Bowring, 11 vol., Edinburgh, London, 1838-1843, reprint Thoemmes Press, Bristol, 1995 ; III [1843], 244). This vol. will be quoted as follows: *Works*, III, followed by the page number.

³ That is the meaning of the word, together with its etymology.

and based on the questioning of many more authors than those whose books have been consulted here. It is nevertheless already possible to look at a few aspects of the history of that notion and at a few perspectives it opens up.

What is first remarkable when one considers the notion of *fiction* is, on the one hand, the discrepancy between the subtlety and precision showed in punctual uses by ancient and classical authors and, on the other hand, the very modest reflection and degree of generalization they managed to reach on that notion, which seemed destined for a higher fortune, similar to that of the imagination or passions. Thus did Descartes, Pascal, and Leibniz with refined subtlety use the notion of *fiction*, which they did not mix up either with *mistake* or with *falsehood*. The English were as subtle. Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume also distinguished it from *mistake*, *error*, and *falsehood*. Yet, apart from Hobbes, who took care to define it⁴, not many authors before Bentham tried to generalize the knowledge on fictions (which is present in laws, politics, and ethics, as well as in the sciences philosophy, and what we call aesthetics) and to build a *theory of fictions*. Bentham himself did not even invent the expression “theory of fictions”, which was proposed by Ogden as recently as 1932. The notion of *fiction* everywhere assumes a fundamental as well as covert role, and is used in a rather homogeneous way, whatever the domain it is applied to, at least apparently. Yet, nobody before Bentham desired or wanted to unify that knowledge, whose value no one questioned. The useful, decisive, as well as surreptitious, uses of the notion of *fiction* did not allow it to be efficiently theorized. Moreover, when Bentham tried to realize that unification and that theorization in his work *A Fragment on Ontology*, starting from a legal and political reflection, particularly in *Chrestomathia*, to the domain of what could be called *epistemology*, and then to logical and ontological reflections, not many people followed suit. His work was not pursued, but only repeated without being enriched, or reinterpreted in rather a poorer way, if one is to judge from John Stuart Mill’s *System of Logic*. The latter devoted a whole book of his work to *fallacies*, but understood them in a completely different

⁴ In *Elements of Law natural and politic*, Book I, Chap. III, § 4, he defined what is commonly called fiction as a “composition” of “chimeras, and other monsters, which are not in *rerum natura*, but have been conceived by the sense in pieces at several times”.

way than Bentham since he very directly linked them to the logic of induction that he advocated, as was foreseeable, while losing the essential part of Bentham's project by transforming the *theory of fallacies* into a simple *theory of sophisms*; that is, by identifying *fallacy* to a mere error of reasoning. The problem is then as follows: how was it possible that a theory which, to twentieth and twenty-first century men, seemed at least as important when the foundation of sciences was at stake? Critical projects (e.g., those of Kant, some Kantians like Cassirer, Hegelian, Marxist and phenomenological projects), having given their measure, apparently did not have the hour of fame that all the essays we have just mentioned had. Was the opportunity missed, as far as the theory of fictions is concerned, or did the project fail for necessary reasons due, for example, to the little scientific value of the notion of *fiction* and to the impossibility of sketching a logic of it? There is no point, out of some resentment, in us redoing history and advantaging a notion that did not develop nor get the importance one might wish. But the question may be asked today whether it is possible to inherit a technique and a knowledge that have not shown their worth. During the second half of the XXth century, some conscious efforts were made by linguists like Jakobson and psychoanalysts like Lacan, while some efforts that were fruitless or unconscious of their legacy were made by semiologists (A. J. Greimas, J. Fontanille, H. Parret), sociologists, or ethnologists (like B. Vernier), aesthetics philosophers (like N. Goodman, M. Riffaterre), and more recently in epistemology (of mathematics in particular⁵), to reactivate that knowledge of fictions. Is it possible to say what those efforts allow us to think that is original and specific? Can the knowledge of fictions be active and likely to be integrated in a contemporary reflection on what perceiving, feeling, and mathematics are, and even to contribute to the history of a few subjects? Our project is double: to understand what hindered the development of the notion of *fiction* while asking whether that hindrance is contingent, in which case it could be erased, or whether it is intrinsic to the notion, which would make that defect resistant and unacceptable.

I. First of all, what are we talking about when we talk of *fiction*?

⁵ With H. H. Field and M. Balaguer.

Is it not the great heterogeneousness of the notion, of its foundations and of the developments it engenders, which is the very problem? Bentham tried to unify the notion. His attempt must be assessed through the question of what can still be made of it and whether it entangled things so much that this could explain the relative failure of its theorization up to now. In order to assess the diversity of meanings of the notion of *fiction*, some examples are necessary.

The extra-territoriality of an embassy refers to the small space which the capitals of states reserve on their land for all the other states to signify that this space is inviolable and *must be considered as* a small fragment of the state in question, so much so that it is unacceptable that some police or army operation should be conducted by the host state, at least not without the assent of the authorities of the guest state. It is through some fiction that the parents or tutors of an under-age child are *considered to be* responsible if the latter has caused an accident or committed an offence. Even if they have not directly committed it themselves, it all happens *as though* they had at least made it possible through their relationship to the minor and their attitude towards the latter. In political philosophy, the *social contract* is called a fiction when the obedience to a government is being allegedly legitimated or contested, rightly or wrongly so. The citizens of a state will be *considered as if* they had unanimously accepted their being governed by such and such sovereigns⁶ at least once, though such a promise or engagement was probably never made and consequently is never really enacted or perpetuated, though the hypothesis that it is being feigned. Anyway, even if such a promise were made in the past, how would it still bind us today? If a more real, more concrete foundation were found, of collective interest or utility to obedience, would not that supposed promise seem at once to be fallacious? But caution is necessary: would the collective interest or utility, though more real than the different types of promises that the theories of contract consider, completely cease being fictions?

On a completely different level, should not one consider the continuity of objects to be a fiction, as Hume did, though the impressions that allow us to

⁶ Be it a monarch, a majority in Parliament out of which the government and the ministers are formed, or any other sort of government.

infer them or to infer their existence are themselves discontinuous? One may indeed, against the very evidence of discontinuity, assume stable objects outside our impressions that would supposedly give the latter a real foundation, but there is no possible point of view to warrant a sort of double or parallel existence of impressions and of the objects that are supposed to correspond to them. How could objects be assumed without the help of impressions, and how could one, from discontinuous impressions, project continuous objects without elaborating a risky construction that could not be taken as given by the things themselves without some strange faculty to forget what one does to build them? It may happen that such a manoeuvre, contrary to what happens in the case of the “social contract” for example, be unavoidable in order for one to live in a stable world. It is nonetheless true that it is a fiction to assert the continuity of objects. As it is one, in still other modes, to state the unity, identity, and personality of the *ego*. When we talk of the *ego*, we never deal but with a flux of impressions and ideas that we think we can immediately refer to an ego and structure out of an ego, as if it were possible to know spontaneously where the ego starts and where it ends, as if we had to believe that sort of spontaneous construction, without first carefully reflecting on the laws that control the working of that flux and on the spatial, temporal, and causal illusions which it entails. The illusions of the unity, identity, and personality of the ego, grasped as immediately true and of a substantial reality, are fictions that are assuredly fallacious, but which are nonetheless necessary for the equilibrium and health of men, who, without them, would give way to the most dangerous psychosis, and are above all necessary to the spontaneous respect of the law, in particular of property law.

In a quite different mode yet again, a methodical one this time, a great number of results in the sciences would not be obtained without more or less deliberately resorting to fictions. Leibniz had undoubtedly shown that space is a fiction, above all so when it is given a function of inherence and when it is considered that the relations between the different geometrical beings are in it, as in a sort of substance. The relations - and the relations of relations - are enough without our having to invent a being that would shelter them, or that they would inhabit. Yet, such an illusion is in a way unavoidable, and it is quite impossible to give space some existence, even though it did not have any reality. But the fictions in mathematics do not only cause interference on methods through an illusion of transcendence they share with language, they often coincide with methods themselves, as in the case of the “indivisibles”

and the “fluxions” or “differentials” at the beginning of the infinitesimal calculus and in the way it was practiced throughout the decades, if not the centuries, that followed. In order to put an end to rectifications, quadratures, and calculations of centres of gravity, it is necessary to identify small fragments of curves or of curvilinear surfaces with minute segments or minute planes, which are so minute that they are near-zeros and may be treated as such, so that when they are neglected singularly or in small numbers, nothing as such is neglected. But at the same time - and such a double treatment irritated Berkeley against the irrationality of the mathematics of his time - those small quantities may be added, when they are taken in an infinite number, otherwise it would never be possible to assimilate a curve to a polygon, or a curvilinear surface to an infinite number of planes, etc. The very method of mathematics, which is based on the principle of contradiction, stretches that principle in order to get results, in a very utilitarian way. Berkeley objected to the mathematicians of his time for mixing truth and utility. In fact, things were much more complicated, and Berkeley was defending an outdated and fruitless rationality, for unless reason is given a sort of eternal nature and unchangeable substance, it is changed by the results it gets. Through infinitesimal calculus, the great principles of identity and contradiction are defined differently. Within the logic of that calculus, A is not really A any more, but A must differ from A only by a quantity which is as small as wanted, which opens the door to all sorts of inventions and audacities. Fiction may thus signify not only some dubious, evanescent intermediary which is forgotten as much as possible as long as some Berkeley does not come to proclaim his bad conscience with lessons of rigour and logic, or some disputable mediation between two conceptual moments, but much more the powerful moment of the concept, which modifies the principles themselves. Berkeley was conscious that his adversaries were not only Newton and the Newtonians, but Leibniz himself who had dared to write that “the principle of the principles is the good use of ideas”⁷. Fiction produces its own rationality.

It is possible to establish it in yet another way in the domain of

⁷ *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Book IV, chap.12, §6.

mathematics where situations, in which possibility counterbalances⁸ existence and is even more important, are measured with a degree of precision that is perfectly rigorous. Probability is a strange object which cannot have existence. Only such and such events have had or will have any existence and yet it is possible to assign a value to probability with indisputable rigour. Of a situation it is possible to say that it has one-in- n chances of happening. It is even possible to say that one may have one-in- n chances of being wrong when one ascribes such and such degrees of probability to an event. The object thus described has even less reality than a square, a circle, or a cycloid, even though as abstractions those figures have no empirical existence. Yet, fictitious though they may be (for probability or expectation are as fictitious as the point of view of the superior intelligence which would know of no probability that Laplace dreamed of), such a probability and the measure that goes with it have nonetheless an effective value and influence on the thinking and assessing of reality and real practice. In that last sense, fiction is the creation of a point of view which has no empirical existence, but has sense only for an intelligence which would not know the necessity of things, without nonetheless being deprived of all practical and decisive power by such an ignorance, which thus would be in an intermediary state between existence and non-existence, between existence and possibility, whose ontological status would be delicate but could be calculated and be the object of universal acknowledgement.

The example of probability also reveals that the thinking of experience itself does not go without fiction, not only through the resorting to experiences of thought which, for example, in Leibniz' system, have us resort to *void* and *atoms* in order to give infinitesimal calculus the material points it needs, even when *motion* is concerned, which Bentham constantly used as an example to establish the existence of fictitious entities. Fiction may thus be given yet another sense, which, this time, is close to that of abstract ideas. For Bentham showed that we create the nominalized notion of *motion* from what we experience in moving objects, as we substitute the ordinary discourse $A > B$, the more learned one, which can reveal itself to be more useful and more rigorous in certain cases, of $A/B > 1$. The notion of ratio, which is fictitious, is given existence and is talked about **as if** it

⁸ If we may use that archaism.

existed in the same way as one of its terms. In the same manner, *motion* is called uniformed or accelerated, or uniformly accelerated, etc., **as if**, in experience, it directly designated something which could be qualified in the same way as a substance is, which is obviously not the case.

This list of examples, which is too long and at the same time much too short, could be continued, for nothing has been said, following in Bentham's silence, of fictions in the literary or, more generally, the aesthetical meaning of the word. In order not to make our talk too long, nothing has been said either of perspective, of shadows, and of the strength of colours.⁹ But the problem is there already: Do all the fictions we have just referred to have the same meaning? What allows us to link them together and call them all *fictions* if they are not so in the same sense? What is common between the "as if" of some of them which allows some gleaming of legitimacy, the status of general ideas or abstractions of other fictions, the "considering as true" which forces contradictions or overcomes them, and the creation of places that have no reality? Undoubtedly, groupings are possible. Undoubtedly, behind each one of these examples, whole galleries of very different cases emerge, of which the classification may seem possible. But it is difficult to deny the differences between the treatment of the indivisibles and the treatment of motion, between political legitimacy and the conception of the ego as identity or substance - especially since some of those fictions seem to be the result of unacceptable computations, and even of trickeries, while others seem to play a perfectly rational role, and even a role that creates rationality. How is it possible to establish a common measure or, if that is not possible, a system of those diverse notions? That is the task Bentham undertook, and we must now assess his success¹⁰.

⁹ We nonetheless tackled that issue in an article entitled « Plaisirs d'espaces » (in: *Le paysage et la question du sublime*, Association Rhône-Alpes des Conservateurs, Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997, p.119-136) and more recently in *Théorie de la perception. De l'espace à l'émotion*, PUF, Paris, 2000).

¹⁰ The following analysis, which we are summing up, was many times undertaken by Bentham. See the bilingual edition of *De l'ontologie* Seuil, Paris, 1997 for a more complete presentation. See also the bilingual edition of *Théorie des fictions*, éd. Le Discours psychanalytique, Editions de l'Association Freudienne Internationale, Paris, 1996.

II. Bentham's theory of fictions

Bentham talked of *fictitious entity* as opposed to *real entity*. First of all, it is to be noted that it is at the moment when entities (i.e., substantives and nominal functions) are produced in discourse, that the question of knowing whether they are *real entities* or *fictitious* ones appears. As Berkeley and Hume quite rightly saw it, one of the properties of language is to make believe in a sort of reality of the thing that the noun designates. Thus "a real entity is an entity to which, on the occasion and for the purpose of discourse, existence is really meant to be ascribed"¹¹. Note the close connection of the *reality* of an entity and of the *meaning* it is given. *Reality* only has sense in relation to a discourse, in its function of nominalization, and not to a *belief*, which is more intuitive than discursive, as was the case in Hume's work. "A fictitious entity is an entity to which, though by the grammatical form of the discourse employed in speaking of it, existence be ascribed, yet in truth and reality existence is not meant to be ascribed"¹². It is treated *as if* it were real, and all the more so since discourse does not allow proceeding differently, but it is a known fact that it is not real. Bentham sometimes established lists of what could be considered real, simply adding that what was not a real entity was a fictitious one. Fortunately, he went further than the dogmatic and realistic interpretation of his doctrine, whose real sense, as he himself showed by deliberately getting us out of sensualism, was relativistic, for in his discourse, the mathematician cannot hold as *real* the same beings as the physicist. What the essence of the real entity and of fiction is, in language, the act of considering something real or fictitious, it being understood that the act of considering something to be fictitious (a fictitious entity) presupposes the act of considering

¹¹ *Théorie des fictions*, p. 44. The reader who would here think that this is a definition of real entity would have any right of contesting Bentham's use of the adverb *really* in his definition. But it is not, to Bentham, a definition. It is a *paraphrase*. What is important in that paraphrase is the possibility for the real entity to transcendently establish the intended import following a certain mode. In the real entity, the structure of the sentence goes hand in hand with the *meaning*, the signifying intention, whereas structure and signifying intention are contradictory in the fictitious entity.

¹² *Théorie des fictions*, p. 48.

something to be real (a real entity): “Every fictitious entity bears some relation to some real entity, and can no otherwise be understood than in so far as that relation is perceived, a conception of that relation is obtained”¹³. Understanding a fiction means being able to link it, through a certain number of relations, to a real entity, without which it would be meaningless. The number of relations that is between the real entity and the fictitious entity in question gives the degree of remove of the fictitious entity. “Reckoning from the real entity to which it bears relation, a fictitious entity may be styled a fictitious entity of the first remove (first order), a fictitious entity of the second remove (second order), and so on. A fictitious entity of the first remove is a fictitious entity a conception of which may be obtained by the consideration of the relation borne by it to a real entity, without need of considering the relation borne by it to any other fictitious entity. “On the contrary, a fictitious entity of the second remove is a fictitious entity, for obtaining a conception of which it is necessary to take into consideration some fictitious entity of the first remove”¹⁴. To illustrate his ideas, Bentham takes the example of *motion* and follows the mathematical method of derivatives in a near paradigmatic fashion¹⁵. It is also possible to imagine, though he did not do it explicitly, that he drew his inspiration from Bayes’ system of probabilities, which distinguishes between the “probability” of an event and the “chance” of being right (or wrong) in assessing it. *Chance* is a *probability of probability*, as *motion*, in its characterization, may entail a *motion of motion*¹⁶.

The characterization of Bentham’s fiction is now detailed enough for us to stop for a moment and look at it.

The first reflection that those formulations of Bentham inspire is that they give an impression of unease and embarrassment, though they were

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ *Théorie des fictions*, p. 48-50.

¹⁵ Thus I may say that a body moves and make of the motion a “first-remove fiction”, but I can also qualify the motion and say that it is continuous, regular, irregular, by creating the substantives “continuity”, “regularity” and “irregularity” of the entities “of the second remove”, and so on.

¹⁶ When the speed of a trajectory and the speed of that speed, that is, acceleration, are observed.

indefinitely repeated, from the beginning to the end of the work, with a few variations which we will have to come back to later. The invariant is the assertion that the fictitious entity is, as the real entity, what is considered to be real in discourse, which is embarrassing on the logical level, for it does not allow for the expected distinction. The difference is simply that the real entity is presupposed for the fictitious entity to have any meaning, while the reverse is not true, that is, the real entity does not seem to need the fictitious entity to be stated. But such a formulation is disputable and was so even for the author, who readily acknowledged that there could not be any discourse without fictitious entities and, above all, showed himself relativistic enough not to posit real entities that would be of the first remove in themselves. What exists is the distinction, in every discourse, between real and fictitious entities, though such a separation is linguistically undetectable, which justifies the resorting to ontology. Was Bentham able to express that separation which, through language, affects all our psychic acts?

His theory of *meaning* oscillates between a voluntarist conception of the speaker who wants to assert or challenge a reality¹⁷, and a conception that makes it a property of language, in particular of syntax - what Bentham called *grammatical form*. Fiction is quite indicative of the conflict which is supposed not to happen in the case of real entities where the signifying intention goes hand in hand with syntax. In the case of fiction, syntax alone leads us to assert a reality that we desire or want to challenge, since we do not intend to give the fictitious entity any existence, truly and in reality. But *who* does not mean to give it any existence? A fictitious entity can mislead the listener as well as the speaker, for it is possible to lie or to be deceived by fictitious entities. They are even essential instruments of lies and abuses in law, politics, and ethics, and even in the sciences where they can delude us by making us believe that something of ontological import is being said, though only words are being used. *Fiction* is, as real entity is, a place of mistake and lie, but Bentham's wording does not quite indicate it. It would even insist, in the text quoted, on the consciousness of falsehood and unreality. But there is an equivalent of mistake in *fiction*: this equivalent is

¹⁷ Following a voluntarist conception, I voluntarily bring in my discourse a being of which I know that it does not exist as a mere thing.

called *fallacy*¹⁸. This *fallacy* is precisely different from *mistake* in that it contains a particular intention of deceiving, be such an intention unperceived by the person who falls victim to it and transmits it, or be it the deliberate deception of someone who sets a trap for his listener in order to obtain particular advantages. The formulation of fictitious entities is therefore at fault, for it lacks clarity. Bentham directed the fictitious entity towards ideology, but did not go to the end of his intention in the paraphrase or definition which he gave of the fictitious entity. But was it possible to define or paraphrase it better?

Apparently, for it to be a fiction, the notion must encompass a contradiction, and, for reasons other than truth, since the contradiction compromises it, it is nevertheless accepted, reflected as it were by a sort of *screen* which prevents it from escaping and bursting.

III. A theory of fictions therefore necessarily contains a dialectic

It has certain similarities with the work that can be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the chapter about “Transcendental Dialectic” and it contains certain differences. *Dialectic* is here understood in the Kantian sense of systematics of specious reasoning and contradictions which reason enters when it tries to focus on objects that are beyond all possible experience, though neither Hume nor Bentham used that term in that sense, though Bentham’s contacts with Kantianism were apparently quite limited. This word (*dialectic*) nonetheless perfectly qualifies Bentham’s work, in which the proposition is considered to be more fundamental than the word, and, consequently, the contradiction or the interplay of contrary propositions more fundamental than the substantive of fiction itself.

Everybody could see that real entity comes into play with fictitious entity so that what is considered as a real entity can be seen as a fictitious entity from another point of view. Is it to say that, far from solving the

¹⁸ In the XVIIth century, the word “fallace” was still used in French. Coste, Locke’s translator, naturally used it to translate *fallacy*. Leibniz used it as well. It is a great shame that it is no more used and really deserves to be reintroduced, for it is absolutely necessary in French.

contradiction (the chief aim of dialectic), the theory of fictions makes us fall back down in the same skepticism from which it expected to get out? To take an instance in Descartes' work: Is it the fiction of the "new world", the world of principles, laws, and the hypothesis of material swirls (*vortices*) that explains the ancient world, which must be taken for the real one? Or, conversely, is it the new world that is the real one, whereas the ancient is nothing but a fiction (i. e., the totality of phenomena that cannot be explained without the keys of the new world)? The discourse of fiction seems to admit this double approach. Is the discourse of fiction a revival of skepticism or may it pretend to transcend its contradictions?

My idea is that fiction may be considered as the solution or the transcending of a contradiction. To use now the example of Hume, who did not explicitly consider the notion to be a fiction, *sympathy* seems to have been elaborated to solve a contradiction or a group of contradictions. The flux of impressions and ideas that the mind of men is can be structured in the opposition between the ego and the other, without it being quite easy to know where the limits of the ego and of the other are. But it is apparently impossible to feel anything of the other that does not happen in me. Similarly, nothing is mine which was not first sculpted, like an image, by the other's presence, even though I would not feel it anymore. How could such a contradiction be solved? By sympathy. Sympathy gives us the impression that we cross the infinite, modal distance that is between us and the other. This is at least what we think. Through the significants of sympathy, we do as though the difficulty, and even the impossibility, were overcome. We do as though some point of view were possible and could be adopted to harmonize the feeling of our self with that of the other. We are inventing, on that point, but we do as though we felt it and discovered it, even though it is deeper still than anything that can be felt of it. Out of sympathy, men feign to find themselves capable of feeling the same thing in the same manner, while they imagine and can only imagine such a posture. The fundamental confusion, as Pascal well saw it, is that of *feeling* and *imagining that one feels*. Sympathy is a construction that denies itself. It does not recognize itself as a fabrication and feigns to discover itself as a feeling. Fictions can symbolically cross contradictory positions. Their function is to do *as though* they were crossed, as founding the possibility of crossing them. Through this latter feature, it can be observed that we must

not underline too strongly the deliberateness of the fictions and that we can be lured, while making them, by their invention we take for a discovery (or: we unconsciously consider as a discovery). The deliberate fabrication does not exclude unconsciousness, which would be rather the evidence that the fabrication was a success.

The difference between such an attitude and the attitude of transcendental philosophy is clear. The latter would quite willingly start from the fact that a connivance or a contact with the other is felt and would wonder how it is possible, whereas the theory of fictions can question the supposed experience, not “believe” it and suspect that it is a delusion. It gives more importance to skepticism than a critical theory looking for the conditions of possibility does. The theory of fictions allows us to detect some supposed experiences to have in reality a status of fiction. Whereas critical philosophy does not believe the contradiction in its dialectical part and while it does not give anymore the choice between one proposition and the opposite, the theory of fictions is an instrument that deals with reversibility and that seeks the right balance between contrary propositions.

The particular difficulty of those fictions, of which we have just studied the example of sympathy, is that there is no general agreement on their “solutions”. Hume, as a thinker of fictions, took as a fictitious entity a notion which another thinker, such as Bentham, disagreed with. The utilitarian thinker thought that sympathy was nothing more than the affective and deceitful expression, the fictitious entity of a relation to the other, the symbolical aspect of which was more essentially, more really, expressed in laws, rules, and institutions than in affects¹⁹. This at once poses a serious problem for the theory of fictions: is it possible for it to rule the difference between acceptable and unacceptable fictions? Is it possible for it to establish by itself what ought not to be taken for a real entity and what ought not to be taken as a fiction? Is it possible to conceive of a theory of fictions that would in itself indicate who, between Bentham and Hume, is right, and if, for example, sympathy is an acceptable fiction or not? In other

¹⁹ Even though, as Hume showed, affects themselves require to be instituted. Hume used the expression “to establish the passion” (*Treatise on Human Nature*, Selby-Bigge, Oxford, 1978, pp. 335, 357). Passion would never become love or hatred..., without a point of view to give it that name and establish it as such.

words, do we have to integrate imagination and affectivity into the fiction that allows us to imagine or to believe that we are attuned to the other, as Hume thought, or must we completely reject them and keep only a linguistic theory of the symbolic system, as Bentham proposed, and as Berkeley had already tried to do in the more limited frame of a *Theory of vision*?

It is true that Bentham himself hesitated, for he sometimes presented fictions as deeper than language itself²⁰, and language as one of the productions of fictitious activity. But, even though the identification of the symbolic to the linguistic system, which has been done too rapidly, must be thought again, Bentham seems to be more accurate than Hume on that point, for it quickly appears that, in the Humean way of the working of passions, the theory of the double association is possible only if impressions, be they of sensation or of reflection, are stable enough and mixed no more than ideas, which is only possible if language founds them. Thus, *some problems may be solved* as soon as the theory of fictions is considered to be a theory consequent to the symbolical system. Up to a point, the theory of fictions analyzes the difficulties and carries on the inquiry to a solution of analytical style.

But, most of the time, it is necessary to construct the solution between the two contradictory theses by enduring the contradiction. The work to be done then quite resembles that of mathematicians when they are treating “inverse problems”²¹. What we called the *screen* of fictions is transformed by the mirror dialectic in such a way that the stating of a problem that the fiction is supposed to solve is inverted. Thus, to take the example of sympathy²², which we should better call from now on “identification”, from another angle, it is possible to assert that if men had the same nature, they

²⁰ After saying that “to language, then - to language alone - it is, that fictitious entities owe their existence—their impossible, yet indispensable, existence”, Bentham at once added that fiction was “as much as a sort of verbal reality”, “contrivance but for which language could not have existence” [*Bentham’s Theory of Fictions*, ed. C.K. Ogden, (New York, Brace & Cy ; London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1932), 137].

²¹ For example, the demonstration of a proposition is not identical with its converse. The law of large numbers (law of Bernoulli) is inverse to the rule of Bayes.

²² Which is solved when it is understood that the symbolical dimension runs deeper than the imaginary effects to which sympathy is often reduced to.

would all feel the same thing in the same conditions (given nature), but, conversely, that if men manage to do the same thing in the same circumstances and to imagine that they feel the same thing in the same circumstances, they are only imagining that they belong to the same nature, as Caesar's soldiers imagined they were of another essence because they belonged to the same legion, though they were recruited in the most diverse provinces of the Roman empire, and not among the most honourable citizens (constituted nature). When it is not possible to decide whether there is a nature or not, it is possible to elaborate the fiction of *identification*, in the same manner as the solution to Bayes' problem implied the making of the notion of *chance of being right* (or wrong), as long as it is impossible to know whether it will some day be possible to apply the law of large numbers to the events that must be considered in too small a number for the time being, or rather as long as we know we do not have enough information on them.

The main difference between a theory of fictions (be it in Hume's sense or Bentham's sense) and Kantian dialectic is that the latter resolves its contradictions by dissolving them, that is, by showing that in fact they are not so and that the opposite propositions would never have been opposed if they had been understood within their limits, or if, for example, phenomena had been distinguished from things in themselves, while the former *builds* its solutions *up* and forces its way through oppositions. Fiction is not the same thing as some recognize. It always is a *construction*, even though this were forgotten, or even though it made itself forgotten under the appearances of some reminiscence²³. A fiction becomes a *fallacy* when its begetter (or its listener) forgets that it is a construction. Whether one accepts or rejects the existence of a human nature, sympathy or identification makes the explanation of behaviours possible.

One of the difficulties nonetheless is to know whether a contradiction is really solved by the elaboration of a notion which, by incorporating or integrating contradiction, feigns to become positive. Is the consistency of a

²³ Bentham was as critical as Pascal of that notion of reminiscence which, to both of them, seemed to cover the reality of experiences. Pascal thus contested M. de Roannez on that theme and Bentham launched an attack on the system of *common law* by feigning to presuppose the existence of a law established before any writing.

notion thus made *ad hoc* to be believed to be able to solve contradictions? Moreover, the idea of *dialectic* contains that of systematicity of contradictions and sophisms. Without wanting to discuss whether Kant managed to realize that systematicity in his own dialectic, we ask the question whether it is possible for the theory of fictions to satisfy it. Up to now, we have understood that the analytical work of a theory of fictions may be conducted in an original and specific manner by the inspecting of the contradictions of each notion thus proposed, in whatever field, of its seams, when notions have been fused, and of the reasons that led to those seams, which may be linked to a pressure quite different from that of truth. In that sense, the criticism of notions as it is done in the theory of fictions is always at the same time that of the ideology or ideologies that surround them: the values of truth can never be separated from other considerations with which they are intertwined. But is there a link from the criticism of a fiction to the criticism of another? And is it possible to conceive that that link be of a logical nature, as Kant suggested, in *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the deduction of his categories as much as in his dialectic?

Kant's criticism of empiricism is well known in which he must have thought of Hume: empiricism is a wandering *nomadism* and it follows no logical order. It is true that Hume did not explain the passage from the criticism of time and space to that of cause, which he studied for a long time, nor to that of substance, be it of external objects or of the ego. From a Kantian point of view, the same may be said of Bentham's *Fragment on Ontology*.

But is it not the very project of logically conducting a dialectic that is apparent and disputable? Is not dialectic essentially linguistic, or, at least, does it not fundamentally find its starting point in particular languages? It is obvious, for example, that the disputing of substance, be it that of the *I think* or that of external objects, cannot be made with the same insistence in English, in which, thanks to the gerund form, verbal forms can be nominalized without being completely transformed into nouns, while keeping their factual nature, as it is in French, in which the speaker is obliged to give substance to what he wants to nominalize. When, moreover, the primacy of the active voice over the passive reinforces the nominal feature in a language like French, it is clear that the dialectic urgency, on that point, is not the same as in a language in which, through passives, the speaker is easily given a place that they too much tend to forget in the former. Languages are situated in such a fundamentally different way

towards what they refer, that the dialectic through which they criticize themselves cannot have the same function in them all. All languages may welcome the Kantian dialectic in them, but it does not seem as relevant in each of them. Bentham was undoubtedly right in *Deontology* (more precisely in *A Table of the Springs of Action*) when he pointed out the deep link that existed between the language he was working in (English) and the objects or materials²⁴ he was dealing with, that is, classifying and organizing. He gave a still more interesting research orientation when he proposed a different distribution of his objects according to the different languages²⁵. Thus Bentham recommended a real dialectic of dialectic, though he did not globally realize it, which was quite in accordance with a motion that the theory of fictions had pointed to. That author may at least be read that way.

Transcendental philosophy quite readily imagines that it can overcome, if not simply ignore, the plurality of languages and state its problems (that of analytic or dialectic) independently from the language in which it is exposed, in a certain way as one imagines that objects are seen in a theory of perception expressed in mathematical terms. From one point of view or from any other, one in the end sees the same objects, according to the ideology of perspective, and one even imagines that one can deduce, situated as one is, how one would see the same things if one were situated otherwise. In the same way, even when one expresses oneself in one language or in another, one is, according to transcendent ideology, in the end related to the same objects and problems. But nothing is less certain. And it is as wrong to think that one may at once overcome the singularity of a language, without even formulating the problem, or even taking time to look at its solution, as to think that the mathematical conception of perspective gives the truth of all positions. The singularity of a language is such that it only apparently occupies places accessible to another language.

²⁴ Affective, legal, political, economic and religious.

²⁵ *A Table of the Springs of Action* presents the idea of elaborating the tables of pleasures and pains in different languages. *Deontology*, ed. Amnon Goldworth, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, p. 88, (n.7): “Constructed in different languages, a Table of this sort would afford an interesting specimen of their comparative copiousness and expressiveness”.

The interplay of notions, which one precisely cannot separate from languages, cannot similarly appear in one of them and in another. Translation is a *coup de force*, as dialectic is one, in its ontological and transcendental pretension, when it dissimulates the fact that it is an invention under the guise that it is a systematic reflection. In privileging the linguistic domain rather than the logical one, the dialectic of fictions may be fairer than that of the transcendental philosophies, in which the construction of their solutions and, even more, the linguistic singularity of their point of view are ignored.

Given the relation to such a promotion of the symbolical system, which Hume did not encounter, difficulties remained from Bentham. Bentham talked of *psychological dynamics*, by which he referred to the forces that underlie the perceptive and the symbolical systems, and which the philosopher must decipher. But the promotion of the symbolical was such for him that it did not leave any room for what could appear as an independent force of the interplay of perceptions and above all of language, so that one wonders how he could realize his idea. Hume, who practiced *psychological dynamics* without mentioning it, as Monsieur Jourdain did with prose, did not encounter that problem since the symbolic was articulated for him with the interaction of forces given by affectivity, so that it was affects that, for Hume, indicated the reality of the psychic processes and asserted their truth.

There still remains a difficulty of the theories of fictions. Though the promotion of the symbolic is too insisting, it does not allow the development of the dynamics that is necessary to explain psychic processes, above all if criticism is a denunciation of ideologies. On the contrary, if the symbolical coexists with the affective, the latter constantly tends to decompose under the effect of the former. The theory of fictions needs to be accompanied affectively or dynamically by the symbolic, but it does not manage to preserve it, quite simply because it destroys it of its own motion.

Another difficulty in the theory of fictions is this one; it can easily be pointed out in works by Descartes. Fiction is a being of the will (that can be introduced and withdrawn as we like) as well as a being of the understanding (that cannot be withdrawn after having been introduced). But where and how to stop a fictitious fable? Is it possible to draw rules of limitation from the theory of fictions? Must we receive them from outside and where from?

IV. What is that union of concepts and values?

In Book VII of his *Seminar* (among other texts²⁶), Lacan, who saw in Bentham someone else other than the promoter of the “Panopticon”, and who understood that the theory of fictions was the core of his work), completely disassociated the theory in which he could see some foundation for human sciences. In a certain way, he turned the strong part of Bentham’s philosophy, that is, the promotion of the symbolical, against the feeble part of it (which to him was constituted by a philosophy of social happiness inherited from eighteenth-century utopias) and showed the self-dissolution of Utilitarianism. Lacan’s diagnostic is interesting, for it is at the heart of our subject.

Undoubtedly, Lacan did not think that a society may be ruled by the famous calculation of pleasures and pains made by a learned legislator, whose only care would be the coexistence of those pleasures and pains. The society of concupiscence, as Pascal would have said²⁷, seemed absolutely refuted and radically untenable. Utilitarianism is a fiction that is as developed, and may be even worse, than the political and social fictions that he refuted. Lacan may be right, but the strongest point is elsewhere. His diagnostic on the utilitarian ideology was that it was born out of the collapsing of mastery²⁸. Though strange it may first appear, such an

²⁶ Together with the seminar entitled *L'éthique de la psychanalyse* (1959-1960), Seuil, Paris, 1986, the seminar *Encore* (1972-1973), Seuil, Paris, 1975, largely developed the theory of fictions.

²⁷ *Pensées*, Br. 451: “Concupiscence was used as best we can to make it serve to the common good, but this is mere sham and a false image of charity, for fundamentally it is just hate.” Br. 453: “Out of concupiscence were made admirable rules of polity, ethics and justice, but, at root, that bad heart of man, that *figmentum malum*, is only concealed; it is not pulled up.” See Pascal, *Pensées*, Penguin Classics, London, 1995

²⁸ What happened at the beginning of the XIXth century, was the utilitarian conversion, or reversion. The moment of the radical decline of the function of master may be specified. It was undoubtedly historically conditioned... It is in Hegel’s work that may be found the extreme devaluation of the position of master, for he is made the great dupe, the magnificent cuckold of historical evolution, since the virtue of progress is obtained through the ways of the vanquished, that is, of the slave and his work. Originally, in his plenitude, the master, when he existed, in Aristotle’s times, was quite different from the Hegelian fiction, which was nothing more than the reverse, the negative and the sign of his disappearance. It was shortly before that end stop that, following a certain revolution affecting inter-human relationships, the so-called utilitarian thought appeared, which is far from being the pure and simple platitude that it is supposed to be.” (*Séminaire*, Livre VII, Le Seuil, Paris, 1986, p. 21)

assessment is of rare depth and underlines the essential, which lies in the notion of *authority*, of which we would like to show the value in a theory of fictions, all the more so since Bentham partly missed it, and even disputed it. Authority in a way freed itself from its almost exclusive investment in the figure of master (in all its forms, not only pedagogical, but also political, religious and economic) and largely pervaded all concepts, all norms and all harmonies of concepts or norms. The theory of fictions is fundamentally a theory of authority. To understand it, it is necessary to follow a detour.

Concepts often delude. They readily stand in an analytical isolation which is consecrated by the uniqueness of a noun and they appear to be separated from other concepts, trying to be externally related to them. The analytical purity seems to imply that such a situation is unavoidable, or the ordinary language would mix up all the notions and would not make it possible to reach an authentically scientific expression. It often happens, among the classical authors (as Berkeley) as well as among modern (as Carnap in *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*) that scientists and philosophers play on two levels, and, after giving a purely analytical version of what they think is the truth, give another version in vernacular language, which is considered to be more confused (in that it gives more room to things than to relations). But one has to ask, as Hume did, whether that supposed analytical purity is not a false clarity, whether a concept may exist in a state of isolation, whether a notion is not precisely true when it is intrinsically linked to other notions, *intertwined* with others, *rooted with others*, as is said in the essay *Of the Origin of Government*²⁹. Apparently, Hume did not dare launch, in the theoretical domain, assertions as neat as he did in the practical domain.

On the practical side, Hume defended the idea that a feeling, an action or a behaviour cannot be said to be ethical if it has not been ordered by other reasons than ethics itself.³⁰ The question is not here to know whether those

²⁹ Hume, *Quatre Discours Politiques*, Centre de philosophie politique et juridique, Université de Caen, 1986, p. 146, note 40.

³⁰ In *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume asserted that “no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality” (Book III, Part II, sec. I, ed. Selby-Bigge, At the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, p. 479).

reasons are natural or cultural. What is important is that there are other reasons than ethics that hang over moral judgement itself. It is not difficult to show that it is the same in the theoretical domain. No doubt, *probability* may be defined as a ratio of cases or, what is not the same and entails formidable problems of coherence, as a fraction of certainty. Nevertheless, as is seen in Pascal's calculation, which was its birth certificate in mathematics, the notion of *expectation* (*espérance*), as was considered in the recurrent mode of reasoning that was imagined to solve the problem of division, only had any sense in a certain way of considering the relation to riches and business, which was not much dependent on arithmetic, but much more indebted to a liberal structure of the economy in which conceptions of business and inheritance were imposed beyond even the political obstacles of the time. Besides their logical connection, concepts are *related together* in such a way that it is impossible to grasp one of them without taking into account all sorts of relations it has with others, of which it is only detached through some abstraction whose limits must be clearly understood.

Values are related as concepts are. The value of truth of the stating of the problem of division and its solution in Pascal's work cannot be separated from that of equity or fairness that ruled the new modes of considering share-outs³¹. Socrates used such a relation. In the middle of a conversation on justice, he blamed Callicles for ignoring the value of geometry. No value could possibly play its part while being separated from the others. A theory of fictions may be the best theory to look at that type of quasi-parental dependence. It is all the more so as it makes it possible to lay the stress on such and such notions by each time modifying the degree of their fictions, that is, their way of aiming at or being linked to such and such entities that are considered to be real. The strength of the theory of fictions is that all that it holds is necessarily intertwined with the rest and that the intertwining is respected in its analyses. There is no concept without concepts, no value without values, no concept without value: the coherence of a notion, the fact

³¹ "The settling of what is to be given [to the players] must be so much proportionate to what they had the right to hope from fortune, that all must be equally prepared to take what is given to them and go on with playing" (Pascal, *Oeuvres complètes*, NRF-Pléiade, 1954, p. 115). The right to hope is inscribed in the very axiom that gives the rule of the solution.

that it overcomes the contradiction that divides it, are made certain by the fact that it can never be isolated from other notions and values. It is noticeable that valorisation, affectivity, non conceptual binds are linked to the conception by language. The linking of conception by one or several words can go so far as to contradict the concept on main points. It is the fact that it is impossible to separate from practical values (as utility, interest, happiness, etc.) that gives its cohesion to fiction, which would collapse without them. Bayes' probabilities, which are used by the economists, would have no sense without some investment of desire, which is at once and gradually contested, that is, measured and assessed according to the information that is found as time goes by.

The insistence on desire and even on the relation between values, between concepts and even between values and concepts, allows for a question, which is at the same time a remark. Is it a matter of chance that one of the best chances of a theory of fictions, in human sciences, nowadays seems to point towards structuralism as it is implemented in Bernard Vernier's analyses of the family relationships that still prevailed a few decades ago on the Greek island of Karpathos? Vernier exposed a family and economic structure which seemed untenable and consequently unstable when presented *in abstracto*, since it radically favored the eldest who inherited all the family goods, while the younger were completely excluded. But such a structure, which may seem to us quite unfair, prevailed for centuries thanks to some affective compensation which linked the younger to the eldest, and by all sorts of by-constructions, more or less aberrant, which nonetheless enabled the younger to survive and to make their way according to dubious but recklessly asserted likenesses with more or less distant relatives. Without its affective lining, which is not simply a reflection, the family structure would have collapsed because of its own contradictions. This is a structure of fiction which is exemplary of all the other structures, not only of concepts and their semantics, but also of values.

It is an exemplary, not a simple analogy. If a family structure gives such a good idea of what happens in the domain of values, it is no doubt because the mind is constituted in the phantasmal mode with the objects and relations it builds outside itself and then interjects ³². It is not only truth

³² We use that psychoanalytical term, which, especially in its Lacanian meaning, insists

which has a structure of fiction. The mind itself is constituted in that mode, projecting itself outside and organizing a sort of reflexive return. It is not possible to mention them all, but a good number of explicative schemes can be applied to themselves a second time in the reflexive mode, after being applied in the determining mode, and thus seem to give a second identity to the mind. Thus, *perspective*, which seems to apply directly to sense experience, can again apply to itself in the affective mode, as Merleau-Ponty showed, when he wrote in *The Primacy of Perception* that “any consciousness is perspective, even the consciousness we have of ourselves”³³. This may be understood in two different ways: the first one, which is not of much interest here, in which perspective is some immediate and elementary data of consciousness, while in the second it is a constitutive element of consciousness, so that its identification by a sort of interjection is made possible. If objects may be interjected, why would relations not be so? Is not relation an intrusion of relation in the understanding, in the manner the understanding interjects so many other objects?³⁴

But, though we now understand or at least perceive that the notion of *fiction* may be of great use when what is at stake is the articulation of values and concepts, we still have not solved the problem of knowing why some fictions are fallacious while others may be accepted. This is where the notion of *authority* comes into play. As to why a theory of fictions is

on the mind's borrowing features to the objects that are outside it, or to the inherent qualities of those objects.

³³ *Le primat de la Perception*, Verdier, Paris, 1996, p. 42. *La Phénoménologie de la Perception* (NRF-Gallimard, Paris, 1945) refined that point when it established the existence of a “mythical space in which the directions and positions are determined by the residence of great affective entities.” (p. 330), and developed it, as is seen in the use that is made of perspective, p. 379: “No doubt, the world gets its profile first in space. [But], deeper, spatial profiles are also temporal: a place that is elsewhere is always something that has been seen or could be seen. And even if I perceive it to be simultaneous with the present, that is because it belongs to the same wave of duration. The aspect of the town I am approaching changes, and I can experience that, when I stop looking at it for a moment and then look at it again.” Merleau-Ponty gave perspective a role that implied the working of the whole consciousness.

³⁴ It is quite the sort of logic Hume used, when he seemed to found legal rules on the laws of imagination (SB, 510-3). Are not those rules a pure fantasy of the mind which interjects legal rules in an attempt at justifying them?

necessarily a theory of authority, we can now suggest the beginning of an answer. The theory of fictions places us at the crossroads of a logic of truth and an axiology, and that constitutes the very difficulty of it.

For as long as any fiction only becomes stable thanks to different values, other than truth, since fictions are contradictory, those values are necessarily opposed the one to the other, in order to be accepted or rejected. What is the principle of such a competition? Is there a value of values that would allow us to understand what happens between pleasure, happiness, the true, the fair, and the useful that would not be the simple arbitrary choice of one of them, which choice would be doomed to failure? There are undoubtedly several values of values - is not tolerance typically one of them, and in a way, is not any value a value of values? Yet, among them, *authority* must be distinguished. It must be so, for quite obvious reasons, for it is quite exactly the expression of a competition between values. Before concluding, we would like to say a few words on that fundamental value of *authority* in a theory of fictions.

V. A theory of fictions is a theory of authority

Bentham hesitated on the question of *authority* and took up contradictory stances towards it. Sometimes he made *authority* the prototype of *fallacy* and opposed it to reason itself, following the rationalist tradition. That was what happened in the *Handbook of Political Fallacies*³⁵. On the contrary, in *Chrestomathia*, in a much more refined way, and above all in a way more in keeping with his theory of fictions, he disputed the ideas of *cause* and *effect*, which seemed eminently dubious to him, whatever sense was given to them³⁶ and found that the notions of *author* and *authority* were more real³⁷. He may have found that second stance already quite firmly established in Hume's work.

³⁵ The first part of the book is dedicated to *A Treatise on Political Sophisms* (in: *Fragment sur le gouvernement. Manuel des sophismes politiques*, Bruylant LGDJ, Paris, 1996, p. 193ff.).

³⁶ See, for example, *De l'ontologie*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1997, p. 129-151.

³⁷ Causality is a fictitious entity of authority: "cause, when that word is used in its proper meaning, is the name of a fictitious entity. If you want the real name of the entity that corresponds to it, substitute the word *author* to the word *cause*" (*Chrestomathia*, p.280).

It is true that in Hume's work, as in all the works of political philosophy, the *authority* of politicians is mentioned without any pretension to originality, as well as that of magistrates, of governments and the governed, of a state upon a territory, of a state upon another state as is the *authority* of the people, public *authority*, and the *authority* of parents, and it then designates, in the ordinary meaning of the word, the manner of a power, its legitimacy, or the simple ability and skilfulness in exercising it. But *authority* was given a much wider sense in Hume's work, for he talked of it not only as the entitlement of a person to do such and such a thing, have such and such activities, but also as the entitlement for an object to bear such and such a name, for a representation, an experimentation or a reasoning, and even reason itself impose themselves on our minds. He even talked of an authority of authority, of a right to authority, which is the same as legitimacy. The change from the authority of persons to the authority of things is made through the authority of a rule of law or of language. The *mind* does not only know physical forces, but also forces that are much more ideal and fictitious, though they be exercised with as much, if not more, efficiency, for they leave less room to manoeuvre to the mind, which cannot escape the comprehension of a sign, of a perception, or of an affect, though it might feign it through some specific psychic activity. At least, if the mind manages to escape it, it is often with less room to manoeuvre than towards some physical force.

Though Hume indicated, and insisted upon the fact that *authority* is an essential concept, as important as *sympathy* for example³⁸ (he dedicated the last words of his work to authority, since *Essay of the Origin of Government* ends upon its consideration), he nonetheless never stated it with as much energy as sympathy. He simply pointed to where the problem was, by marking, as was his wont, by *and* or by *or* the link between the two concepts (*force and/or authority, power or authority* [SB, 315], *weight and/or authority* [SB, 324]), *immediate cause and author* [SB, 349]. It is the link between force and authority, between weight and authority which should particularly be the focus of attention, so crucial is the problem in the philosophy of affectivity and in the philosophy of perception. In his *Treatise on Colour*,

³⁸ P. 321: "These two principles of authority and sympathy influence almost all our opinions".

Goethe made all sorts of calculations of forces. Of course, those forces are not physical ones, though our body is called upon by the forces in question, as being their condition of possibility. But those forces that, for lack of better words, I call *ideal*, may not be physical ones, it would not be more absurd to have a look at the way they work, oppose one another, are associated, are named and added, than to do it for forces that are said to be physical, and are not less symbolical³⁹ than the first, though in another sense. It would at least be possible each time to sketch their specific topics and dynamics. The aesthetical reflection may be decisive on all those points, for it is true that a color in a certain context, a line, a musical theme, a concord, may exert considerable forces upon our minds. This, the “authority of the works”, as Hume said, or the authority in the works, may be the starting point for our understanding of the notion in all the meanings we point out.

The only consistent indications of Hume on that point, besides his interest for the degree of vivacity of impressions and ideas, concern his considerations on the displacement of authority and of the modalities of its transfer or of its translation, as if authority were changing from signifier to signified, without reaching an ultimate signified (SB, 508, 540, 551, 552, 559). As if, at the end of the day, there were no definition of authority, as if it were what is being passed on and given.

One may argue that the notion of *authority* we are here sketching will not help us much in making the difference between the acceptable fiction and *fallacy* in comparison with the pressure that the notion of *utility* could exert on contradictions. At least, we lose nothing in comparison with Utilitarianism, and it appears more plausible and less arbitrary to account for the competition of values. But, in both cases, it is through a strange mixing of different values that a notion imposes itself, without it being possible in advance to say what the criteria that such a mixing must satisfy to consist in. But do we better know, supposing we pretended we could take into account only criteria of truth, what clarity, distinction, or adequacy are? Criteria are not more stable than the notions they are assessing are fixed. They simply do not evolve to the same rhythm as notions. Hume evoked the question of

³⁹ Physical forces have meaning only in a location of material points in a time and space where their mass, their speed and acceleration may be grasped and related.

the ageing of titles (SB, 508) and of the future of authority (SB, 552).

It may be argued that the undertaking we here recommend under the names of *dynamics* or *topics* of authority, which seems to be the essential figure that the competition of values takes, is contradictory in that it itself pretends being true while disputing the supremacy of truth, through its very practice and contents, since truth is opposed to other values, which is at the very origin of the problem of authority. Here is one of the multiple ways Husserl had of attacking skepticism and particularly that of a theory of fictions that he easily attributed to Hume as being a “hard perspective”, before punishing it by calling it absurd⁴⁰. But Husserl’s arguments, which were inspired by what could be called a “dogmatics of the true” cannot trouble us. No doubt, the situation of a theory of fictions is contradictory. But do we have any choice? Do we decide upon that strange situation in which we treat the true at the same time as a sort of object of investigation and as what we cannot prevent ourselves from soliciting? *Fiction is a cipher of our condition* and we cannot declare that the fact that “all that through which knowledge transcends impressions and ideas” is treated as a fiction is absurd without ourselves absurdly feigning to overcome that condition.

Conclusions

1. The question that remains about such a transfer onto *authority* of the major problems of fiction is to know whether it is more efficient than their transfer towards values such as *utility* or *interest*. The main difficulty that is encountered when thinking that those last values make it possible to find the coherence of fiction and to disentangle the fictions that are acceptable from those that are not, is that those values are part of the interplay of values and could not possibly be more entitled than others to set themselves as ultimate. That leads us, because of the competition of fictions, to look for the title of their distinction into *acceptable* and *not acceptable* in the ascendancy that one takes over the others. But *authority* itself presents difficulties. The *first one of them* is that it is not because a fiction overcomes the others that it is the better founded. In other words, force is different from authority. Overcoming the others is not yet the evidence of a supremacy of authority. But how can authority be

⁴⁰ See particularly: *L'idée de la phénoménologie. Cinq leçons*, PUF, Paris, 1970, p. 42.

distinguished from force? What is best entitled to dominate may be crushed by force. But saying that is falling into a *second* difficulty. If victory is not a good sign of authority, does it not become unavoidable to present authority as serving other values (justice, happiness, utility, or whatever else) than itself, as if it had no consistency in itself? But authority has its own value, if only that of being able to settle values into reality, since they are not naturally in it and could not possibly be there spontaneously. The problem is, and that is a *third* difficulty, that we may find again the abyss that threatened on the side of fictions. Who, indeed, what instance, will be able to say, without exerting any coup de force (which authority intends to distinguish itself from) on what side the validity of the overcoming of a configuration of concepts and values is? The regression could well go on endlessly.

2. We confess that we are little convinced by M. Scheler's way of locating the authentic value of authority when he created the idea of a *moral discernment* which would specially allow to recognize values⁴¹. That sense of values that would qualify real authority, be it detected in the agents themselves, who invest themselves, or in another, gives the impression of a *deus ex machina*, which transforms the problem into the solution. The insufficiency of such an inversion is clear: if authority is not force but some institutionalization in reality, neither is it what may be detected by some "moral sense", whose *ipsedixitism*⁴² is obvious. But then, what gives authority to fictions, if it is not the very fact of some domination, or the certainty of being more entitled than others to assume such a domination? To answer that, it seems difficult to avoid considering a to-and-fro motion which, from the reality of the conflict or the competition between the configurations of concepts and values that the fictions are, goes up to consider rules and laws, and then goes back to that reality loaded with new assessments that are always too chimerical, but whose intention of rectifying reality is not altogether absurd and completely out of place.

3. One may here ask where the great principle of Hume is - that the shift from "to be" to "ought to be" needs to be examined better and denounced. Are not our previous considerations come to such a degree of

⁴¹ M. Scheler, *Le formalisme en éthique et l'éthique matérielle des valeurs*, NRF Gallimard, Paris, 1955, p. 335-336 [339-340].

⁴² To use Bentham's expression.

confusion? But could Hume himself respect his principle, when he talked of measure creating its own phantasms, which the history of techniques itself allowed to correct, or when he talked of cause following the psychic dynamics from which it results, while giving it logical rules? Apparently, it is difficult to *a priori* define rules that would make it possible to distinguish between fictions without going through unending historical processes, which would look like the slow and infinite uplift of law by *Common law*.

4. Of the theory of fictions (is it necessary to add that?) we have presented only a simplified vision here, for we do not have all the necessary instruments, nor a precise idea of its expanse. We have shown, at least in some diverse sectors, that the theory of fictions perfectly applied and allowed for original characterizations. It seems reasonable to wish that such researches allow to go further, though Bentham quite legitimately thought that they were a matter for ontology, that is the science that is desired or looked for, as Aristotle called it.

Neither do we have a precise idea of its logic. But I think it is possible to work towards one. The actual difficulty is that it is possible but it is not so easy to withdraw it after it has brought its effect. We introduce it to beget an effect but the withdrawing of it is difficult. Nevertheless, I suppose that a solution may be reasonably expected on this point.

5. Such a theory is a critical one, which, far from endeavouring to confirm a sort of analytics of elements that would be set beforehand, finds out about its objects and the motion of their concepts, whose increasingly sophisticated folds allow the mind, through some sort of interjection, to identify to them or to be assimilated into them on a more or less long-term basis. That procedure, which is not preceded by anything else than cultural acts themselves, which produce methods, results, works, and values, has meaning only insofar as the person who allows that interjection works on those objects and their concepts without placing themselves too much outside them. This is approximately that type of task that P. Kaufmann undertook about K. Lewin's "theory in the field" and in the domain of psychoanalysis itself, which he practiced.

6. The last conclusion is that we had better talk of the theory of fictions as a theory of culture or of civilization rather than as analytics; for example, though it does have some properties of the latter, no concept is analyzed without being related to others that belong to different fields, nor any value isolated from other values. A theory of fictions is therefore constantly stating its object while always

suspecting the discourse that seems to be on the object to be at the same time, and maybe more fundamentally, a discourse on another object. A discourse on relations of likenesses within families is as fundamentally a discourse on the perception as a discourse which is supposed to be more directly on perception is a discourse on a manner of considering language or politics, for behind it a conception of perspective, a conception of translation or political power, is visible. A theory of perspective can also inspire a theory of affectivity. The theory of fictions is a generalized practice of the mirror, which inverts the direction of the schemes and theses that offer too easy supports, and makes it possible to wonder whether it is not the contrary, that perception should be read from translation or the theory of perspective from affectivity.

It appears that fictions are classifiable under three headings: the hypothesis we make while we know that it is false; the intrinsic contradiction; the effect of screen or inflexion by which a notion or a proposition gets its “transcendence” and seems to return upon itself. Furthermore, each one is relying on the other; so the difficulties of contradictions are solved by making some transcendence. But we have still a long way to run before solving the question of admissibility (validity) or inadmissibility (invalidity) of a fiction; except by the criterion that the construction stands fast or does not.

Bentham said that truth was “a powerful and strange sort of character, a sort of a slippery eel”. Lacan also said more gracefully but with a touch of sexism, that it was a sort of nice girl coming out of a well, shivering and nude⁴³. It seems that it is playing on the interaction of reflection of mirrors that does not make the same be symmetrical, but displace it. That displacement and transformation allow the differentiation and efficiency of the work of fiction in its distance from the provisory real entities. From the moment one is convinced that sciences and theories are fundamentally *constructions*, that they are neither a return to an origin, nor dependent on some original soil, that they are no more descriptive in the meaning of a copy or of a lay out, but that they are productions of fictions, philosophy only has to interfere in that interplay of theses so that they reflect one another and oppose one another, for their authority to better reveal itself.

⁴³ Lacan, *Écrits*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1966, II, p. 232.